Strengthening Liberal Arts Education by Embracing Place and Particularity

A Teagle Foundation White Paper

Prepared by Calvin College

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http://www.calvin.edu/go/place

Acknowledgments

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Over the years, we have been grateful for the opportunity to reflect on place, and on our specific place, in the company of other liberal arts colleges, and we trust that the work made possible by this grant will enrich the national conversation. This project has stretched our imaginations, and we hope the liveliness that we experienced will be contagious.

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Abstract

This paper describes research undertaken by Calvin College to explore the intersection of the liberal arts and the particulars of place. This research posed several key questions for exploration: How can the liberal arts tradition serve the common good in a particular place? How will liberal arts be seen as an important resource for members of a particular community? How can we use our city as text to strengthen liberal arts education for our students and to strengthen engaged scholarship/research for our faculty? In other words, how could a particular place inform and shape the teaching that occurs in liberal arts classrooms as well as in research undertaken by faculty?

Fourteen faculty members formed interdisciplinary working groups to examine theoretical perspectives on the convergence of liberal arts and place, and their collaborative writing appears under Theorizing Liberal Arts and Place. Over five hundred pages of data from interviews with faculty, students, alumni, and city/community leaders were analyzed by a team of social scientists to assess the difference a critical pedagogy of place makes within the liberal arts tradition. Research findings are shared under the section Assessing Liberal Arts and Place from Multiple Perspectives. Case studies of projects developed in a wide variety of disciplines which connect liberal arts and place are also included with pedagogical suggestions to foster student learning and engagement. Creative ideas for celebrating liberal arts and place are described under the section Celebrating Liberal Arts and Place: Embrace Our Place Festival. Lessons learned and recommendations for the future conclude the white paper.

Our findings suggest that a focus on place provides opportunities for liberal arts colleges to enlarge the scholarly imagination and to broaden college impact on the lives of students, on faculty, and on the larger community. Please check our website: http://www.calvin.edu/go/place for continuing updates to our place-based work at Calvin College.

Theorizing Liberal Arts Education and Place

Introduction

Hannah Coulter, the eighty-year-old sage of Wendell Berry's novel by the same name, mourns the leave-taking of her children from their hometown by their experiences in higher education:

> *We wanted them to have all the education they needed or wanted, yet hovering over that thought always was the possibility that once they were educated they would go away, which, as it turned out, they did."*[1]

In the novel, Coulter's children come to symbolize Berry's contention that higher education produces "itinerant professional vandals" who are unable to care for real people in real places.2

This is the experience of many. Higher education, and more specifically, the liberal arts, is designed to move its participants beyond provincialism into a more global, more abstract understanding of the world. But this goal of higher education has its downside, and Berry's warning resonates with educators who are concerned about how to develop engaged citizens, capable of caring action. And so the abstract concept of place, accompanied by new attention to real places, has entered higher education as an antidote to rootlessness. Is there a way to conduct higher education so that its vital abstractions exist together with the strengths and resources and concerns and stories of a real, particular place?

At the same time, real people in real places may fail to understand the actual gifts of the liberal arts. In our experience, communities have been slow to recognize and use the gifts of the liberal arts in city planning. At a recent state-of-the-community breakfast, leaders from business, from education, and from the government discussed the present and future of our city—Grand Rapids. While all acknowledged that Grand Rapids is going through tough economic times related to the decrease of manufacturing jobs in the area, many of the leaders expressed a measured optimism. They asserted that Grand Rapids has resources that will help rebuild and maintain our fine city, in particular, the new biomedical corridor and the technological training offered by the community

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[1] Wendell Berry, *Hannah Coulter* (Washington, DC: Avalon Publishing Group, 2004), 151.

[2] Wendell Berry, *Home Economics* (New York: Northpoint, 1987), 50.

college. But no one mentioned the liberal arts as a valuable resource for enhanced city life. Did the leaders simply forget to mention the resources of the several liberal arts colleges in the city?

Big questions are the lifeblood of liberal arts education: Who am I? How do I relate to people and the earth around me? What is a good society? Are there standards for beauty? How do good communities work? When a college begins to understand that it is embedded in a *particular* community with particular issues, strengths, and needs, the college can relate these big questions to a specific place. When the specific place sees higher education as a resource for the big questions being faced, dynamic opportunities develop. The concerns of a place (e.g., urban revitalization, literacy, education, race issues, environmental issues, etc.) create the context from which teaching and scholarship grow. The particular illumines the abstract, and the abstract opens eyes to the particular. A place-based approach to the liberal arts is a good answer to the concern that Berry expresses through the voice of Hannah Coulter.

The History of Liberal Arts Education and Place

American educationalists have long contested the meaning, purpose, and goal of liberal arts education. Broadly speaking, the argument comes down to the meaning of the term "liberal" (from the Latin word *liber*, meaning "free"). One understanding, derived from the eighteenth century Enlightenment project, takes it that a liberal arts education is to free students from their antecedent opinions, from the idols of their tribe, from the provincialism of their perspectives on life. Passing through the refining fire of rational criticism, students are to gain entry to the cosmopolitan world of pure Reason—to a realm of knowledge achievable by all who forsake belief on the basis of hearsay, superstition, and authority—for the rational methods of testing and assessment recommended by the sciences. They are to reject time-bound and place-bound traditions for the sake of universal principles embedded in the common faculty of Reason.

This—the Enlightenment understanding of the purpose of liberal arts education—stands in contrast to what we might call the classical understanding, which carries with it a very different view of what the word "liberal" brings to education.[3] This view is most readily discerned at the origins of liberal arts education in the age of the Athenian democracy and the heyday of the

[3] Here we follow Bruce A. Kimball, *Orators and Philosophers: A History of the Idea of Liberal Education* (New York: Teacher's College Press, 1986).

Roman republic. There freedom was not the goal of education, but the condition. Liberal arts education was for those who were already free from the necessity of work by virtue of their aristocratic social standing. Liberal arts education was education for those who were excused from the necessity of work and thus had time for civic engagement. Such education was not designed to divest students of the beliefs and values of the ambient culture, but to enable them to serve the local polity in accordance with those beliefs and values. The study of grammar, for instance—part of the trivium in the classical roster of the liberal arts—was not just a matter of learning the parts of speech or rules for well-formed sentences, rather, the study of grammar was designed to expose students to the ideals and values encoded in the canonical literature of the day. By reading Homer, Simonides, and other revered poets, Athenian students of the liberal arts were to learn about the lives of heroes worthy of emulation, about what the gods like and dislike, about the virtuous life and how to live it. It was an exercise in the formation of a person, a formation very much bound to the place and time of the community in which that education took place. Liberal arts education was for the preparation of civic leaders in the place-based, political community, and that education was itself informed by the time-bound traditions that held sway in that location.

In sum, the Enlightenment understanding of liberal arts education carries with it a drive or tendency towards placelessness, as it uproots its students and escorts them to the free-floating view from nowhere. On the other hand, the classical understanding tends to consolidate the hold that place and antecedent tradition have on its students. The project is of classical understanding is one of inculcation—it wants to form students according to the ideal and values of the age, to fold them into locality.

Examples of both the classical and the Enlightenment views are evident in American educational history. During the early national period, as the experiment in democracy gained stability, two types of higher education institutions were established.[4] The most common in antebellum America were small, locally supported, residential, liberal arts colleges modeled in the English classical tradition. Increasingly common as the century wore on were larger, more comprehensive universities in either the "agricultural and mechanical" (A & M) tradition or the

[4] Only a handful of colleges were founded prior to the American Revolution (Harvard, Yale, Brown, Dartmouth, William and Mary, and a few others) and all in the classical, liberal arts tradition.

state flagship tradition.[5] The 1862 congressional legislation drawn up by Senator Justin Morrill of Vermont—the Morrill Land Grant Act—traded federal land in each state for the establishment of state "land grant" universities. While each of these types of institution generally maintained a set of liberal arts requirements, they diverged in their degree of emphasis on this form of education. Private colleges continued to emphasize the liberal arts in the classical tradition, while state universities increasingly developed in the Enlightenment tradition. Following the German model, the new universities emphasized research, provided education for an increasing number of students (including women, minorities, and students from lower-income strata), and favored disinterested learning, all in place of the classical model of learning done by the elite for the betterment of society. Confounding this distinction was an increasingly ambiguous role played by the founding religious traditions in the classical colleges, in some cases these traditions were overtly discarded, in most cases they were subtly replaced by broadly humanist commitments, and in a few cases they were actively maintained within a liberal arts framework.

Another way of describing the dichotomy in the liberal arts tradition was offered by historian James McLachlan.[6] McLachlan suggested that a two-pronged model of collegiate education replace the dichotomy between college and university. He recommended the categories of *cosmopolitan* and *local* colleges and universities. Cosmopolitan collegiate education would include universities and colleges with broad university goals serving a smaller, more select student body, while local collegiate education served the majority of students, much like the current form of community college education today with its emphasis on vocational training.[7] Other scholars have drawn a similar distinction between antebellum colleges and modern community colleges as well.

During the twentieth century, research universities gained clear predominance on the landscape of American higher education in terms of the number of students as well as the size of their overall

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[5] In Michigan, for example, the state's flagship the University of Michigan was established simultaneously to the founding of the state in 1837; the state's land grant—America's first—Michigan State Normal College was founded in East Lansing in 1849. Morrill's legislation required that land grant colleges offer courses in the "agricultural and mechanical arts." Both the land grant and the flagship university tended to derive their educational inspiration from the German Enlightenment model of education rather than the English model.

[6] James McLachlan, "The American College in the Nineteenth Century: Toward a Reappraisal," *Teacher's College Record* (December, 1978), 287-306.

[7] McLachlan, "The American College," 305.

operations. Yet a small set of highly respected liberal arts colleges—some within these larger universities—remain. Lately, each has tried to incorporate the virtues of the other. Recent trends show large universities attempting to recover some of their lost sense of place and intimacy through residential colleges, while small colleges attempt to complement strong teaching reputations with increasing efforts in the world of research.

As the influence of higher education in America continues to spread and access to higher education enables a greater number of its citizens to reach middle-class standing, an additional challenge to traditional commitments to *place* emerges. Middle-class professionals are increasingly mobile, and they are typically committed first to profession and second to geography. The realities of urban flight and suburban sprawl also create living possibilities for larger numbers of mobile professionals, making neighborhood social commitments less likely.[8] This middle-class mobility can be linked to the rise of the undergraduate and graduate education that equips students with disciplinary knowledge for professional careers as an avenue to private success rather than to public service. The concomitant perception of higher education in America has been that of "passport to privilege" rather than a noblesse oblige regard to using privilege for societal betterment.

Higher education in the United States has inherited both traditions, the classical and Enlightenment. And we would do well to honor them both. Clearly an education that seeks only to inculcate given beliefs and values without examination is deficient but so is an education that seeks only to uproot and negate, that leads only to the skeptical suspension of belief and a permanently bemused sense of irony. Products of a liberal arts education should not be uncritical recipients of a tradition nor simply critical rejecters of tradition but, rather, critical participants within a tradition. This goal, a dialectical product of the classical and Enlightenment views, squares with the fact that human beings are finite, embodied, time-bound, place-based creatures who nonetheless have the capacity to think things over, who can compare traditions, who can discern generally valid norms for sorting out what needs to be preserved and what needs to be changed in their own culture. Similarly, liberal arts education would be deficient if it aimed at graduates whose horizon was limited to needs of the local community but neither should liberal arts education seek to produce rootless professionals, social atoms bouncing around in the free space of a market economy.

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[8] See Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000).

Liberal arts education, then, should both intensify students' relation to place and enhance their ability to critically evaluate it. A liberal arts education should take students deeper into their own traditions and locales and also provide students with vantage points by which to assess these traditions and locales. The liberal arts should strengthen student commitment to place and student commitment to making that place a better place—be it local, regional, national, or global.

The larger issue with which contemporary American colleges and universities must contend is the dual nature of inheritance as it relates to the question of connecting the liberal arts to a sense of place and a sense of responsibility to local, place-based communities. These dual paths will continue to cross, and our best hope is that the paths will inform each other. Institutions of higher education are not placeless. Despite charges of ivory tower irrelevance, institutions of higher education exist in actual cities, towns, and communities. This placement itself is a factor for institutions to consider in efforts to develop in students a commitment to place. For example, urban, suburban, and rural campuses exist in very different geographical contexts, contexts that present very different opportunities for civic engagement on the part of the educational community. Online universities, such as the behemoth University of Phoenix, have developed as hybrid institutions, on the one hand bringing higher education closer to where people live—even into their own living rooms—but at the same time bringing education into the placelessness that is cyberspace. The historical developments within liberal arts education, outlined above, raise challenges for those who seek to foster a concern for the particularity of place within students, faculty, and even the institution itself.

Cultivating Care for and Attention to Place

The concept of place is generally contrasted with the concept of space.[9] Space is thought of as absolute universal emptiness, as when we think of the coordinates of Cartesian space that are nowhere in particular and can be used to model any sort of geometric configuration. Place, on the other hand, is essentially local and particular. Place incorporates specificities of geography, biology, history, and social context. Because space is thought of as abstract, while place is particular, it has been traditional in both the sciences and the humanities to think of space as the

[9] See, for example, Edward Casey, *The Fate of Place* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997) as well as his *Getting Back into Place* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993).

arena of universal generalizations, while place offers only particularity, prejudices, and localized concerns.[10]

This picture, however, is extraordinarily problematic for both the sciences and humanities. In the philosophy of natural sciences, Thomas Kuhn developed the notion of a scientific revolution[11] precisely because he began to realize that abstract logic could not account for how scientific knowledge was actually generated. Since Kuhn, more attention has been paid to experimental investigation of actual events in accounting for the generation of reliable scientific knowledge.[12] Some have argued more generally that knowledge needed to be tied to specific conditions and contexts.[13] This recognition was slower to become incorporated into the humanities, in part because thinkers often assumed that their particular perspectives represented the abstract universal. But in the world we now live in, with its plurality of perspectives, even the humanities have moved to recognize that artistic, philosophical, or historical investigations do not begin from abstractions in the middle of nowhere; they begin from particular questions, raised in particular historical contexts and addressed to particular audiences. The generalizations, the universal insights, the abstract values of the liberal arts arise in the midst of particular places and times, and it is precisely when they are firmly rooted in their own context that they have the greatest potential for illuminating human lives.[14]

One of the ethical theories that address the issue of how analysis might move from particularity to generality is the ethics of care. Having its origins in feminist theory, the ethics of care is a

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[10] Casey, *The Fate of Place*, x-xi. For details, see his contrasting descriptions in Part Three "The Supremacy of Space" and Part Four "The Reappearance of Place."

[11] Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

[12] For recent discussions on this, see Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, *Toward a History of Epistemic Things* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997); Joseph Rouse, *How Scientific Practices Matter* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Robert Crease, *The Play of Nature* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993); and Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

[13] For example, in totally different contexts, see Don Ihde, *Expanding Hermeneutics* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1998); Lambert Zuidervaart, *Artistic Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); and Bonnie Honig, *Democracy and the Foreigner* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

[14] With respect to a theory of hermeneutics, rather than ethics, this view of the relationship between universality and particularity is developed in the work of Georg-Hans Gadamer, especially his monumental work *Truth and Method* (New York: Crossroad, 1989).

relatively recent theoretical account of how ethics function in human lives.[15] In care theory, care is the heart of ethics because it is in caring relationships that human beings become capable of being ethical agents; it is in giving and receiving care that we act as ethical agents, and it is in structuring human life to protect, preserve, and enhance care that we create an ethical world. Care theorists have argued that care is always embodied and contextualized because care always begins with personal relationships (though it is certainly not limited to purely personal relationships) and to that extent, care is embedded in a particular sense of place.

An ethics of care that is alert to its connection to a sense of place recognizes the embodied nature of humans and their embeddedness in the natural environment.[16] While some other ethical theories have tended to treat humans as disembodied rational agents, care begins with recognition of and respect for the ways that human life begins with infancy rather than at the age of rationality. But this recognition entails a corresponding recognition that there are no embodied humans who are not embedded in particular places and environments, environments that have physical, historical, and social particularities that are integral to the physical life and development of any human.[17] Good teachers in the liberal arts have always recognized this and offer their students some sense of the historical and environmental context within which philosophy or literature or art is created.[18]

An ethics of care broadens this recognition to mandate attentiveness in any situation that involves relationships of care.[19] Care essentially involves attentiveness to particularity; more specifically, it requires attentiveness to otherness. Attentiveness permits the other to be received as a particular

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[15] See Virginia Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, political, global* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) or Anna Peterson, *Being Human: Ethics, environment, and our place in the world* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001).

[16] We recognize that care theory is not the only possible theory of ethics one might employ in thinking about the human/nature connection. For other approaches, see Mick Smith, *An Ethics of Place: Radical Ecology, Postmodernity, and Social Theory* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001) or Richard Fern, *Nature, God, Humanity: Envisioning an ethics of nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[17] See Wendell Berry, *What Are People For?* (New York: North Point Press, 1990) and his *Life Is a Miracle: An Essay Against Modern Superstition* (New York: Counterpoint Press, 2001).

[18] For two different examples, see David Orr, *Ecological Literacy* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1993) and C.A. Bowers, *Educating for Eco-Justice and Community* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2001).

[19] For an account of teaching from the perspective of care theory, although in a K-12 context, see Nel Noddings, *The Challenge to Care in Schools: An Alternative Approach to Education.* 2nd ed. (New York: Teachers College Press, 2005).

other, not as a projection of one's own preferences or beliefs. Care begins by listening, in other words, rather than telling the other how things will be, and so it begins from a position of respect and other-directed concern. Attentiveness fosters relationships that can be characterized as care precisely because they are not relationships designed to manipulate or control.

One of the rhetorical moves that is sometimes used to avoid or reject the requirement of attentiveness is the invocation of the concept of universal essence or nature. The history of social justice movements is filled with examples of groups who have demanded that their claims be heard. These groups have demanded that those in power be attentive to whom and to what they are, in other words. But their claims have been rejected on the basis of nature. Women, for example, have argued that they had a need for intellectual fulfillment, for basic human rights, and for participation in political processes. The response in all too many cases was that it did not fit with women's nature to allow them to be educated, to exercise basic rights, or to participate in the political process. In this way the concept of nature is often used to cut off attentiveness. If one already knows everything about the other's nature, then there is no point to investigation or to letting the other speak. When we begin with the concept of essence to deny clear claims of particularity, or when nature is a used as a manipulative or controlling concept, as a technique of mastery rather than mutuality, then nature subverts care and its focus on the particularities of place.[20] But when we turn this hierarchy around and begin with a respect for the importance of particularity and place, then these starting points transform conceptions of nature and the natural. We can then begin to recognize that natures are never unified, but plural.[21] We can recognize that by starting with the particular natures of the individuals, events, and places that we care about, we can begin to draw legitimate generalizations about what is good for those individuals or beneficial for particular places. When our initial response to a particular place is to approach it with an attitude of caring interest, its nature is no longer something that prevents it from making claims on us; place becomes, instead, an object of ethical regard with its own unique demands and requirements. And then it becomes possible to work with that particular place, with its strengths and within its constraints, in ways that are not destructive.

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[20] Peterson, *Being Human*, 144.

[21] See Soper, *What is Nature?,* for an account of the multiple ways the term "nature" is used in common and theoretical discourses. See also William Cronon, ed., *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996).

This attitude of recognizing the importance of the particularities of places that comes from an ethics of care is central for an adequate sense of care for the environment. We cannot engage with an abstract environment because environments are always local, though never unconnected to other environments. There simply is no such thing as an abstract, universal environment because any environment is first of all a particular place.[22] What is good for one environment, for example, can be disastrous for another, fertilizers are beneficial for farms but enormously destructive in the fragile ecosystem of the Everglades. Nor can environments be treated as fungible, as if we could justify the loss of rainforest by setting aside nature preserves in temperate climates. If we are serious about meeting our ethical responsibilities to the environments we live in and to the individuals (of a variety of species) who inhabit those environments, we must begin from an attitude of openness to the particularities of those environments and not try to impose a one-size-fits-all set of requirements on every environmental context.

The sciences and the humanities are both needed to provide us with the abilities to be attentive to the particularities of place. The sciences are well designed to offer interpretative schema that allow us to listen to a particular place and to let it speak.[23] The sciences offer important tools for monitoring changes and stasis, for drawing conclusions about long-term trajectories, for categorizing the inhabitants of a place and their relationships, and for evaluating the various sorts of interventions into the place, that are caused by humans, by other species, and by other forces in a particular environment. We cannot attend to a place adequately without relying on the sciences.

At the same time, the sciences alone are not sufficient for attentiveness. The humanities discover and preserve the stories of a place, provide the ground for creative work, challenge the imagination, and relate particulars to the broader world. The humanities also offer a wealth of critical resources that can enhance the self-awareness, that can provide warnings when the search for knowledge becomes a matter of control rather than attentiveness, and can situate studies in the broader historical, social, and philosophical context. Because science depends heavily on categorization, for example, it becomes an easy matter for scientists to assume that the categories relied on are absolute facts about the world. A humanities perspective can function to remind scientists of the ways that categories have changed and shifted in the past and to encourage a sort of humility about today's categories and their probable changes in the future. The concept of a

[22] Casey, *Getting Back into Place*.

[23] See Rouse, *How Scientific Practices Matter* as well as Rheinberger, *Toward a History of Epistemic Things*.

gene, for example, while a useful heuristic in some contexts, can also blind researchers to the flexibility and fluidity of the interactions between DNA and the rest of a cell.[24] When scientists assumed that there are individual units called genes that determine every aspect of a cell, they concluded that any part of the DNA that is not a gene is simply useless information. But more recent studies are consistently demonstrating that so-called junk DNA plays vital structural and informational roles in the cellular environment, a discovery that took a long time to make because of the categories being used to think about this particular environment.

Both the sciences and the humanities, then, have a vital role to play in the study of places and individuals. Both need to begin with an attitude of care and a respectful willingness to approach a particular place with attentiveness, whether the place in question is a rainforest, a Midwestern farm, a watershed that runs through a large city, or the intracellular environment of a particular type of cell. All of these come to us with particularities and their own tale to tell, but unless we approach them with care and concern, they cannot tell that tale adequately, nor can we learn from them how we should respond. This attitude of attentiveness, then, will in turn reflect back to both the sciences and the humanities, requiring both fields of study to learn to begin with contextualization rather than abstract universals.[25] Universals divorced from attention to particularity become (at best) empty slogans or (at worst) techniques of oppression. But until there is a strong sense of the ways that universals are only valid when rooted in the particularities of attentiveness to places and specifics, neither the sciences nor the humanities can be fully ethical.

When the attentiveness to place that generates good science and robust humanities is our starting point, we also find that we are pushed back into a fuller recognition of the ways that we do and should care for the individuals and environment in which we find ourselves. The techniques that allow us to hear the story of a particular place are also techniques that are likely to make us care deeply about that place.[26] Researchers who study marine environments mourn when oil spills destroy centuries-old coral reefs. Researchers studying mosquitoes learn to respect the ways that such fragile insects can be so successful in surviving and reproducing. And we can multiply

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[24] Lenny Moss, *What Genes can't do* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004).

[25] For an interesting account in the humanities that follows an interplay of particular and universal, see Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

[26] For example, see Keith Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1996).

examples here—our point is that the attentiveness that generates understanding also generates a caring response to that which is studied. This care need not lead to stupidity, of course. The researcher studying mosquitoes is unlikely to endorse allowing mosquitoes unlimited access to human blood. But an understanding of the ecological role mosquitoes play might make a researcher less willing to use the techniques of absolute annihilation that were typical of mosquito control efforts in the past. Such techniques have taken a terrible toll on the environment in many countries and have not been particularly successful in any case because the techniques often do more damage to the natural resources for mosquito control (songbirds and fish) than to the mosquitoes themselves.

When we begin with an ethics of care and with a robust sense of the particularities of place, then we find that the relation between worldview and praxis becomes more complex. There is an interplay between particularity and general principles. Rather than abstract principles determining our findings about particular places, we start with an attentiveness to particularity, and draw abstract conclusions after the fact, tentatively, and with contextualizing qualifiers. Generalities inform the tools of interpretation, analysis, monitoring, and action that we use to pay attention to a particular place, and the place modifies the generalities. Rather than a linear, top-down hierarchical model of understanding then, we need one that has multiple feedback loops, built-in techniques for allowing that which is studied to talk back to us, and a respectful attitude toward the particularities of an individual that prevents us from erasing that difference for the sake of abstract principle.

Cultivating Citizens: Place and Formation

In the context of a democratic, pluralistic polity, citizenship must involve, among other things, the capacity to engage those who are different and yet share the same place we inhabit.[27] This engagement is based on the willingness to listen to the voices that are not our own, and the disposition to deliberate productively, to construct a vision of the common good, while remaining alert to the relationships of power and domination that are embedded in the physical and metaphorical architecture of our places. A liberal arts education is uniquely able to equip students

[27] See, among others, Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); *Democracy and Difference*, ed. Seyla Benhabib (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Patchen Markell, *Bound by Recognition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

to participate as citizens in a diverse public space, to present and represent particular identities and concerns as well as to be attentive and receptive to the perspectives and identities of others. Moreover, the process of critical thought that is involved in liberal arts training is one of the most effective instruments to deconstruct the systematic power imbalances that underlie public discourses and interactions.

In order to achieve these goals, the liberal arts must take on the challenge to develop a critical pedagogy of place with specific attention to the civic dimension of public engagement. Liberal arts educators must *affirm* the essential role of place (including practices and habits) that shapes our identities, and then reflect critically and constructively on the *particularities* of the environment in which the college operates. This should include helping students reflect critically and with theoretical depth on how places are created, helping students understand the dynamics of power and place, and equipping them with the tools to both diagnose unjust place-formation and imagine and implement just place-formation. In other words, this would mean that we acknowledge that human beings exist within a cultural context, in a particular "situationality" which leads them to not only critically reflect on their experience, but to critically act upon it.[28] Peter McLaren and Henry Giroux explicate this point: "At the most general level . . . a critical pedagogy must be a pedagogy of place, that is, it must address the specificities of the experiences, problems, languages, and histories that communities rely upon to construct a narrative of collective identity and possible transformation."[29]

From a political point of view, such a proposition requires an acknowledgement of the social and cultural realities that lead some members of any given community to positions of power and privilege and other members to positions of disadvantage and oppression. For instance, in a predominantly white ethnic institution such as Calvin, it is very easy to overlook the racialized nature of what occurs in most classrooms and most cities. This may not be conscious or intentional but happens because much of our academic discourse ignores or renders invisible how whiteness shapes, influences, and places boundaries around what we know (and/or what we don't know).

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[28] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* 30th Anniversary Edition (New York: Continuum, 2000).

[29] Peter L. McLaren and Henry A. Giroux,"Critical Pedagogy and Rural Education: A Challenge from Poland," *Peabody Journal of Education* (1990), 263.

The vision and task of a liberal arts education involves *place* in an essential way, even if the link is not always made explicit. Thus, the task is to elucidate the link between liberal arts education, a sense of place, and a conception of citizenship and civic engagement as well as offer opportunities to tie theory and practice together.

First, an authentic liberal arts education aims to *form* students as good citizens. Such an understanding of education is not just the depositing of information into students as cognitive receptacles but rather education that aims to form students into certain *kinds* of people who are habitually just, not only within the spheres of their homes, churches, and schools but also in their concern for the broader, plural community of the polity. In other words, the goal of education is the inculcation of *virtues* (good habits) so that students become the kind of people who, out of their character (what Aristotle calls "second nature"), contribute to shape and to pursue a vision of the common good.[30] It might also be constructive to think of virtue formation as something akin to identity formation. Scholars have previously articulated useful links between identity and place. For instance, prominent geographer and social theorist David Harvey has noted that dissolution of place engenders identity loss: "It suggests a fundamental spiritual alienation from environment and self that demands remedial measures."[31] It is that alienation which fosters an individualism that runs counter to citizenship—or a nurturing of the common good.

As a result, liberal arts education must *recognize* the critical identity-forming, habit-forming role that place plays (for good or ill) in shaping us (faculty and students) as certain kinds of people who by (second) nature habitually pursue a particular vision of the good life. With this in mind, professors can purposefully demonstrate the connection between identity, place, and citizenship. For example, "the art department… gives artists a venue to exhibit themselves. It has helped to create a figure [of the] journeyman artist, whose work must be made on site, whose presence is demanded, and who travels from installation to lecture, supported by a network of grants, alternative spaces, and universities."[32] And so the academic artist, producing a public self as a means to engage in the contemporary discourse of the field, is tied to his/her identity professionally. On the liberal arts campus, this is an excellent reason for pursuing the

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[30] A full consideration of this would have to flesh out what the common good looks like.

[31] David Harvey, *Social Justice and the City* (London, UK: Arnold, 1973), 308.

[32] Howard Singerman, *Art Subjects: Making Artists in the American University* (University of California Press), 1999.

development of the students' identity, persona, and citizenship. The studio art classroom is not just for developing skills or critical thinking and articulation or decision-making, but it is for the formation of citizens, whose identity is linked to place and to social responsibility. Certainly, identity is phenomenologically tied to place in its formation. Who we are is contingent upon where we are, but it is also crucial to actively engage place as a means toward citizenship, community development, and social justice. We must give students a lens to help them see and connect to the world around them. For example, at Calvin College the urban bike tours and neighborhood walking tours have given faculty, staff, and students an opportunity to see firsthand how patterns of human settlement are directly tied to issues such as urban sprawl, loss of the farmland and other green space, declining tax bases in urban centers, increased environmental and health risks, and the loss of a sense of community. These tours have been used in a variety of classes from sociology, philosophy, nursing and geography as well as in professional development opportunities for faculty and staff. In every instance the purpose is to cultivate a critical awareness of how past decisions have affected places and to create a vision for assuming responsibility for the particular place where we are.

Second, any functional notion of virtue must recognize that a virtue is relative to a specified *telos* or aimed-at vision of the good life. In fact, what constitutes a virtue relative to one story or *telos* can be a vice relative to another story or *telos*. Meekness, for instance, is prized within a story that narrates a gospel of peace but denigrated as cowardice relative to a story of heroism in the face of oppressive power.[33] Therefore, liberal arts education must provide the resources to critically reflect on the historical and political significance of place within a community and institution as well as to articulate a *telos* or vision of the good life that prizes the pursuit of justice for the common good, acknowledges the existence of alternative and competing visions, and connects this with the inescapability of place. Connected to this notion, David Harvey (drawing on Ernst Bloch) argues that the fostering of *hope* (which, according to Aquinas, is a virtue) requires the possibility of a utopian imagination—fostering the ability to imagine the world otherwise. The illusory necessity of capitalist ordering denigrates such an imagination; this means "a loss of hope and without hope alternative politics becomes impossible" (Harvey, p. 156). Liberal arts education should foster an *expansive* imagination which envisions the world otherwise and inscribes the virtue of hope into our character.

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[33] See Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, ch. 10.

Here the primary task of a liberal arts education is *expanding the social imaginary*[34] of both faculty and students, thinking in terms of what might be rather than what currently is. For example, the PLANT! project at Calvin College served as a vehicle to connect students in a sculpture class to the place of Grand Rapids. Whether or not it was a success as an art project, students acquired a deeper understanding of Grand Rapids, and of place, which will inform their future work and citizenship. PLANT! became a project about seeing and about engaging the geography and culture of the city. As students worked in groups to convert unused urban spaces into working gardens or studios or sites for discourse, they experienced a healing of disassociation and alienation and were encouraged to think about what their project could be and how it could be a transforming element in the community.

Third, formation, particularly virtue formation, takes *practice*—a habituating *doing* that inscribes an orientation to the common good and an attentiveness to the other into the very character of the person. Liberal arts education must provide opportunities for *embodied practice and habit formation* which foster just relationships and connections to place and counter unjust practices associated with certain kinds of places—with the goal of inscribing in students, habits that will outlive their college experience. In other words, liberal arts education must *harness* the possibilities for *positive* (and at times *counter*-) formation that is possible by inhabiting certain kinds of spaces as well as critically reflecting on the effects of negative habits associated with other places. Related to practice, and a complementary key component according to both Aristotle and MacIntyre, is the crucial role for exemplars. These exemplars would operate as role models who provide tangible expressions and stories of the one who acts justly. Exemplarity can be channeled either through firsthand encounters with persons who are exemplars or through the narratives and stories of their actions. For example, one opportunity for embodied practice in caring for others and for place is offered through Calvin's Project Neighborhood, an off-campus living experience in intentional community within an urban neighborhood. Guidance from community leaders, college representatives, and in-house mentors provides upper-level students with role models as well as opportunities for personal growth and for making an impact in the community. Focused reflection and learning is integrated into the Project Neighborhood experience through an interdisciplinary seminar in which all residents participate each semester.

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[34] See Harvey, pp. 155-159.

Fourth, practices are inescapably *material*: practices engage the whole person by involving the (intersubjective) body in concrete, tangible activities and rituals of physically in-habiting a place.[35] In fact, there is a dialectical relationship between body and place: a body is a "first" place that both shapes and is shaped by its environment.[36] Beyond that, author (and former mayor of Missoula, Montana) Daniel Kemmis insists on a "politics of inhabitation." By this he means that "to in-*habit* a place is to dwell there in a practiced way, in a way that relies upon certain, regular, trusted, habits of behavior . . . We have largely lost the sense that our capacity to live well in a place might depend upon our ability to relate to neighbors (especially neighbors with a different lifestyle) on the basis of shared habits of behavior . . . In fact, no real public life is possible except among people who are engaged in the project of inhabiting a place."[37] Some scholars have elaborated and reconceptualized the idea: David A. Gruenewald has argued for "reinhabitation," that is, learning to live-in-place in an area that has been disrupted and injured through past exploitation.[38] Reinhabitation requires identifying, conserving, and creating those forms of cultural knowledge that nurture and protect people and ecosystems.[39] One way Calvin is learning how to reinhabit our place has been through the work with Get the Lead Out, a community collaborative working to end childhood lead poisoning in our county. This issue has been identified as one of significant concern for this region. Students and faculty in several different departments have been involved in various aspects of the work: from the actual lead testing, to public education work with local residents, to advocating for policy changes.

Liberal arts education offers students an opportunity to connect what they are learning to how they will live, rather than what they will do. Through the liberal arts experience, it is hoped that students can connect with and learn about a place, realizing that the more one knows, searches,

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[35] This is just to say that we must reject the reductionistic, modernist model of the human person as a "thinking thing"—a development antithetical to liberal arts education. As Linda McDowell notes, Cartesian thinking things are found in geometric "space" not concrete "place." *Gender, Identity, & Place: Understanding Feminist Geographies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 5.

[36] McDowell, p. 65, makes this point by drawing on Elizabeth Grosz, "Bodies-Cities" in *Sexuality and Space*, ed., B. Colomina (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992).

[37] Daniel Kemmis, *Community and the Politics of Place* (Norman, OK: The University of Oklahoma Press, 1990), 79.

[38] See also P. Berg and R. Dassman, "Reinhabiting California," in V. Andruss et al (eds), *Home! A Bioregional Reader* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1990) 35-38.

[39] See C. A. Bowers, *Educating for Eco-justice and community* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2001).

and understands, the greater the interest and satisfaction of inhabiting a place. The overall challenge for liberal arts institutions is that they must look for ways to integrate philosophy and theory with practice, offering a rich learning environment where praxis can take place as an integral piece of practicing virtue. In this white paper, we have woven into this narrative some examples which flesh out our argument that liberal arts education can be strengthened by focusing on the particulars of place. Additional case studies are included later in the paper.

If liberal arts colleges seek to develop active citizens who have a strong sense of place, colleges must begin by examining their own institutions and asking how they can make their own campuses good places to live, work and learn, connect with others, get involved in the communal life of the institution as well as connect to the larger community in which the campus finds itself. The challenges described in this paper are formidable, but (as we have noted) the challenges also offer liberal arts colleges tremendous opportunities to intentionally define their natural, built, social, and learning environments in order to promote virtue and identity and challenge students to be active citizens throughout their college experience and wherever they may find themselves after they graduate.

Assessing Liberal Arts and Place from Multiple Perspectives: Research Findings

Introduction

There is a growing body of literature that articulates the need for pedagogy that is embedded in the particularities of certain places. Throughout this project we, as the principal investigators, argue that place-based pedagogies are needed because the education of citizens must have some direct bearing on the well-being of the social and ecological places people actually inhabit. "The study of place . . . has a significance in re-educating people in the art of living well where they are."[1]

A critical pedagogy of place encourages teachers and students to *reinhabit* their places, that is, to pursue the kind of action that improves the social, economic, political, and ecological life of places near and far, now and in the future. According to Gruenewald (2003), a critical pedagogy of place aims to do two things: first, it seeks to identify, recover, and create material spaces and places that teach us how to live well in our total environments, and second, it seeks to identify and change ways of thinking and being that injure and exploit other people and places.[2]

In this section we explore multiple perspectives on the intersection of liberal arts education and place by sharing findings from interviews conducted with four different stakeholder groups—faculty, students, alumni, and community leaders. We conducted in-depth, semi-structured individual and group interviews with liberal arts faculty, students, and alumni from Calvin College and also with city/community leaders from this region. These interviews usually lasted over an hour in length and were recorded. Student research assistants then transcribed these interviews verbatim, and each transcript was proofread for accuracy. The data was then analyzed by a team of Calvin social scientists who examined over five hundred pages of data to explore emergent themes.

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[1]David Orr, *Ecological Literacy: Education and the transition to a postmodern world* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1992), 130.

[2] See D.A. Gruenewald, "The Best of Both Worlds: A Critical Pedagogy of Place," *Educational Researcher* (2003), 32(4).

This research was conducted using qualitative methodology for several reasons. Qualitative research is useful when the purposes of the research are to understand the events, situations, and life experiences of the participants in the study and the *meaning* they make of these things; or to understand the particular *context* within which the participants act and the influence that this context has on their actions; or to understand the *process* by which events and actions take place.[3] Qualitative research enables analysts to explore the subtleties and nuances of particular contexts and to examine the meaning participants make of the situations and life experiences they encounter.

The decision to collect information from a diverse range of individuals and settings and to use a variety of methods, also known as triangulation,[4] is based on the assumption that this technique helps to reduce the risk that research conclusions may reflect the biases or limitations of a specific method and allows a researcher to gain a better assessment of the validity of research conclusions. "Human beings are complex, and their lives are ever changing; the more methods we use to study them, the better our chances to gain some understanding of how they construct their lives and the stories they tell us about them."[5]

In the following section, are the results of this fascinating study where each stakeholder group identified different angles and emphasized different aspects of the relationship between the liberal arts and place.

Faculty Interviews: Moving "Rootless Professors" into Rootedness

Much has been written about "rootless professors" who move from university to university in pursuit of career advancement with little attention paid to the particulars of any given place. Group interviews were conducted with twenty-five Calvin faculty members from all four

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[3] See J. Maxwell, *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Press, 1996), 17-19.

[4] For more thorough explanation, see N. K. Denzin, *The research act* (Chicago: Aldine, 1970) and J. Maxwell, *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Press,1996).

[5]A. Fontana and J. Frey, "The interview: From structured questions to negotiated text" in *Handbook of qualitative research* 2d ed. edited by N. Denzin and Y. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage, 2000), 668.

academic divisions of the college—social sciences; languages, literature, and arts; contextual disciplines; and natural sciences—to explore this phenomenon and to investigate how place is conceptualized in faculty academic, theoretical work. These interviews also explored faculty understanding of how the liberal arts tradition contributes to the common good in a particular place as well as how this particular place influences and shapes the way the liberal arts are taught and/or how scholarship and research are done at Calvin. As one respondent said, "We're on a unique trajectory for a liberal arts college." In these interviews Calvin faculty describe many ways that the college has connected itself and disconnected itself from this city, Grand Rapids. An interesting aspect of this research explored the connections between faculty members' professional lives (including teaching and scholarship) and their personal commitments. The findings reveal that faculty members employ widely differing disciplinary lenses through which place is conceptualized, and this impacts faculty members' understanding of their academic professional lives. Many describe inherent tensions that exist for faculty, yet many also articulate that an emphasis on place offers opportunities to enlarge the scholarly imagination. See Appendix A for a bulleted summary of key themes uncovered.

Different disciplinary perspectives lead liberal arts faculty to view and interpret place in very diverse ways, and, as might be expected, this leads to a wide variation in how place is conceptualized. What is interesting to note is that each faculty group was asked the same questions, but the conversations unfolded in widely differing ways. The variation in response was quite interesting to observe, particularly the chosen focus of each group. Those in the social sciences spoke primarily about *human community* when they spoke about place, the city, the region. Those in the natural sciences spoke more about the *physical resources* of the place.

> *[If] you go from a place which is rich in glacial moraines to the southwest side of town which is all outwash and flat as a pancake . . . that dictates changes in how the land was settled, to variations in agriculture . . . I can describe that place almost as if people didn't exist . . . but we are talking about place also as a setting for community and its depth of history and all of that…when we ask the question about sensitivity to place, some people will be oblivious to their physical surrounding, let's say geological surroundings, but have a very strong sense of community.*

Some faculty members spoke about *power,* as who decides and controls what happens in a place, articulately outlining why these are important questions for liberal arts study. These varying disciplinary perspectives provide particular lenses through which the world is viewed.

Some expressed the ways in which they felt *part of the city* and used the language of inhabitation and dwelling while others used language implying that we *are separate from* and often described the 'other' when referring to the city.

> *I feel like one of the primary problems that we face in Grand Rapids is this notion of structural isolation, and then isolation is coded by class and race . . . I know my students talk about the inner city of Grand Rapids, which is sort of curious in a city of about two hundred thousand people . . . we aren't an urban center, so they are again using coded language, but language that is informally very common to this area. . . . what my students, I think, are reflecting is the ways in which linguistically we have separated, isolated, divided, moved ourselves apart. That makes even more 'other' that particular group… we further removed them from us by the way even in which we talk about them, so that the ways that distancing has happened in these populations that has continued to disempower those with less power, and keep separate, isolated and maybe not as fully engaged—I think is a primary issue.*

Faculty used the notion of place in multiple ways, sometimes to imply connection, other times to imply isolation and disconnection. Because some viewed the city as having problems and deficits, their comments centered on our responsibility as an institution and as individual scholars to be involved in outreach, almost invoking a charity mentality. This contrasted significantly with other faculty members who described their own sense of place as a contextually situated aspect of their academic work, suggesting they view themselves and their work as a part of the place, using language of inhabitation. Interestingly, those who used language of inhabitation crossed many disciplinary backgrounds (including philosophy, biology, art, sociology, and history), and those who used the language of separateness also came from many disciplines. So it would be simplistic to assume that a person's academic background or field of scholarship definitively frames and shapes the contours of their view of place.

Another disciplinary difference of particular note is the tension articulated between *the abstract and the particular*. Some disciplines very intentionally focus on universal and abstract knowledge, not rooted in particularities.

> *In general economists are abstract from the place. It's just the way economists approach problems, to say the world is too rich to comprehend as it comes, you have to abstract out to which of the salient things, for a particular issue, you are thinking about. And things like gender and race and place tend to get abstracted out often . . . [Focusing on place] is not like an across-the-curriculum movement. I think it might be hard to approach place the way you approach writing, for an example.*

A number of faculty members described a cyclic movement within their own scholarly process—starting initially with something particular then moving to abstract theoretical considerations and finally returning to the particular for application of theory.

> *There's a tension always, though with locational research, in that the idea of research is that it's at least potentially expandable, so you might do research in a specific place. . . .but you need to also be testing something that is more broadly applicable to, maybe, lots of other places, too . . . I think the real life of a research project comes out of asking a specific question, which is often, to a degree, couched in a specific place, and you might learn, you might be able to apply some broader understanding to other places, but you also might need to further test in other environments at the same time.*

The breadth of perspectives and multiple emphases conveyed by the faculty interviewed reveals that there is no single interpretation of the notion of place for the liberal arts classroom. Yet it is precisely this variation in perspective that led to such rich conversations, and a number of faculty commented on the generative nature of the dialogue. New ideas from colleagues led them to think differently about their teaching and scholarship. Such creativity is not without certain tensions.

Almost all faculty members interviewed, described inherent tensions that exist within their professional lives. One tension faculty highlighted was the challenge of *placelessness versus being place-based*. For some, the conversation led to a discussion of how the guild trained them to be academics.

> *Most of us are academically trained to be sort of placeless. And. . . . the argument that most academic theorizing is supposed to apply across places of all sorts and so on, and in biology, when you start getting place-based then you become a natural historian as opposed to an ecologist.*
>
> *I am very aware of people in my broader discipline who are the epitome of that rootless professor, who come from nowhere and are going nowhere but spending a lot of time and effort and grant money getting there. And in the mean time, you are cranking out lots of publications, being very productive, on **that** level getting somewhere, of course, but really having no sense of place and no sense of how their research is embedded in places, no sense of that.*

For others they described that to be a good teacher and researcher they need to be fully involved in the issues of importance to the city and region. Their teaching and research is place-based (at least in part), driven by the strengths, issues, and needs of the unique place where they live and work.

> *I am in a professional program straddling being an educator with being a practitioner. In the educator role, having a particular place has not been valued traditionally in nursing . . . It has been way more about the students than it has been about the community. But it always conflicted with me as a practitioner because everything I wanted to teach about public health nursing is about having a place and working with the people and not coming in with this top-down approach. And so we have now shifted in the Nursing Department here, and it just fits so much better mission-wise with what we are doing as a college but also fits better with me as a practitioner within the discipline. So… it's easier to teach on it because I feel like now we are modeling that in our curriculum.*

Another tension described by faculty members was how to balance *global versus local* concerns. Many made comments about having a global vision but needing to live out this vision in concrete ways in their local environs. Others talked about how their teaching flows back and forth between global and local issues and the interconnections between the two.

> *If you start thinking about plant physiology, not only in the context of natural ecological settings but now in the venue of agricultural production then all of a sudden it opens up into this whole area of food and what that means . . . It can really inform a pedagogy, I think . . . Why is it important to know how a chloroplast works? And so you can talk now about what a plant leaf is doing, and what a plant community is doing in a cultural setting, and what this agricultural plant community . . . how it relates to the natural community, and then how that relates to the people who are living in these various places and need to consume this food. Who is getting it, and who is no?. See, you find very quickly that this really narrow little area of plant physiology all of a sudden opens you out to social justice issues . . . But the interdisciplinary nature of Calvin College allows you to think that . . . Liberal arts actually . . . connects these things. It allows you to see so very clearly what the connections are, between what would seem to be very disparate disciplines, and from an educational point of view, if you want to get a student's attention…all of a sudden it becomes very real.*

A number of faculty members made comments about helping students to think about big questions or global questions and how they connect to particular questions in a particular locale.

> *We can talk about global sustainability and how cutting down rainforest is a bad thing for global sustainability, but you know if rainforest patches are just a theoretical construct, you can do anything you want with it. But go and park yourself in one for five days, and look at who depends on it and how, and how changes in the use have affected communities, and then suddenly, it enriches your capacity to think about what the global goals mean at the local level.*
>
> *We need to be teaching our students how to root to a place, wherever they may end up, how do they engage that community, and so . . . the big question*

> *then is—what is the intersection between being rooted in this place for a time, and how does that translate into their becoming rooted in future places where they will be longer term?*

Faculty members clearly saw the importance of making connections between the global and the local—in both conceptualizing the issues and in learning to take action in ways that connect the two. And they often talked about the need to instill in their students the knowledge and skills needed to make the connection between knowing and doing.

The *professional demands* on a faculty person in terms of time and attention within their scholarly focus create another inherent tension described by many faculty members in these interviews. Some described the demands they feel to be academically rigorous and the constraints this puts on a professor.

> *The pressure to do the kind of scholarship that will garner national, international attention drains away the resources that professors might have to serve on the board of a nonprofit here in town.*

Another described the growing professionalism of all of the disciplines as a potential threat to higher education but also to the lives of individual faculty members as well.

> *I think there is a danger in the growing professionalism of all our disciplines. Namely, that because of the priorities on specialization, publication, and national reputation—there are many forces that pull us away from the rest of our lives, from obligations to family and community and church and the rest. It is triage; if we have limited time, we are increasingly prone to spend that time on what will bring professional reputation and advancement, and this is a potentially threatening dimension of our lives.*

Insofar as faculty perceived their local involvements as a competition to the other demands on their lives, they used words such as "guilt" or "remorse" for their lack of community involvement. The mindscape of these faculty members seemed to imply they view the city as needing charity, and they feel guilty that they cannot be more engaged. For others, however, they describe the place/city/region as a context in which their scholarship (in various disciplines) arises. They do not use language of guilt, disappointment, remorse, or charity in describing place as a competing force. Rather it is simply one context from which scholarly inquiry arises, and as such, it provides rich possibilities for engaged teaching and engaged scholarship. Furthermore, these faculty members articulate the value of integrating their teaching and scholarship and service into a seamless whole.

An emphasis on place offers opportunities to enlarge the scholarly imagination, and this was articulated in various ways by a number of the faculty interviewed. Some suggest that *paradigmatic and epistemological shifts* in the last several decades have opened the door to new avenues of exploration in many disciplines, and, therefore, place and particularity become legitimate grounds for inquiry.

> *I think theories can either pull you away from place of location or pull you towards it . . . And I think that, at least philosophically, when we emphasized the difference between humans and environment or between mind and body…and then the first always was more important than the second, we also discounted particularity, location, and environment. And I think philosophy, at least my reading of philosophy, [has] moved towards a notion of embodiment and not dualism; therefore, we take more into account particularity and location and environment as a way to think about what it means to be human, or what knowledge is, and so forth—which are abstract ideas, but that then pushes you more towards locating yourself in the place and thinking about the place you are located in.*

Some faculty brought up the issue of generalizability in research and mentioned the debates raging in scholarly circles about the fundamental nature of knowledge. Not all scholars agree that the goal of research should be to discover generalizable findings. Some argued that a study could be compromised, if we were only to think about generalizability in a more traditional sense and made a case that studying particularities also leads to valuable and valid knowledge.

Having multiple sources of information, also known as *intertextuality,* was described by some of the faculty interviewed as another opportunity to enlarge the scholarly imagination and further validates particularity and place as a source of knowledge.

> *The term that comes to me is one that I use with students which is, intertextuality, and so it is the text of our lives and how that connects with the print text that we read, with the historical texts, how those combine at a global, national, perhaps regional, and then local level . . . there is an intermixing. And that through print text the potential for . . . localized meaning to become global is very real, much more real than it was even, ten years ago, right?*
>
> *This new language—the intertextuality language . . . we used to talk about, there's history, there's the classroom, there's the location, but we never thought about them all as different kinds of texts, and then linking those texts to see that, it now allows us a new language to do that.*

One of the most commonly discussed ideas in these faculty interviews was the importance of interdisciplinarity. Some faculty described rich interdisciplinary conversation among their

colleagues within the college as a significant benefit for their own professional lives as teachers and researchers. Others framed such interdisciplinary dialogue as a strength of the liberal arts and argued that this is one contribution (along with the asking of big questions) the liberal arts tradition can offer to the larger society.

> *I think liberal arts has something different to offer than my experience, at least, of university education . . . What I missed greatly was it asking bigger questions, sort of foundational questions . . . But I think a place like Calvin—you have an added benefit of the possibility of interdisciplinary conversation. So I've been in lots of study groups [with] anywhere from art historians to physicists to biology people to English people and engineers and nursing and philosophy, and I have been in groups at Calvin over the last twelve years that have allowed this kind of interaction to enrich the kinds of questions that I am interested in. So I think that is a strength, double strength, that we might offer the place that we are in.*
>
> *I think that's what is really, really exciting about being here at Calvin for me personally—the fact that I am not limited to just pressing questions within the narrow confines of my own discipline. But I can look at multiple disciplinary perspectives and being encouraged to do so, in fact.*

These faculty interviews offer insights for understanding not only the role liberal arts faculty can play in using their academic strengths to contribute to a particular place but also the contribution a place can make to the academic enterprise of a liberal arts college.

Student Interviews: Fostering an Awareness and Embrace of Place

The student interviews focused on an exploration of how students learn to identify with their place, their perceptions of how their particular actions contribute to the public good or public harm, the role of their liberal arts education in helping them live as involved citizens of a particular place, and how they form ethical commitments that are transferable to other places and times.

More than forty-five Calvin College students were interviewed in this stage of the study, and they represent all class levels, freshmen through seniors, various racial and ethnic backgrounds, and both genders. In particular, we were looking for evidence that reveals student awareness of place, an articulation of their ethical commitments, and the role of a liberal arts college in fostering these commitments. The findings reveal that the formation of ethical and civic commitments by students is directly connected to (but not limited to) three things: liberal arts curriculum, place-

based pedagogical strategies, and experiences beyond the classroom. See Appendix B for a bulleted summary of key themes uncovered.

The students interviewed, articulated that the **liberal arts curriculum has played a formative role** in their lives, and this is expressed in many and varying ways. One set of responses had to do with what could be a called *a de-centering of the self* or, at least, developing a perspective beyond oneself. Respondents spoke in varied ways about how their liberal arts education has impacted them.

> *[My] liberal arts education really stretched and opened up my eyes to some things in the community . . . or [it] just helps me see things differently . . .*
>
> *The liberal arts gave me certain ideas about altruism and justice.*
>
> *The liberal arts curriculum increase[d] my perspective about just caring for people.*
>
> *The liberal arts allows for all the voices to be heard.*
>
> *I've seen needs . . . how does that connect to the particular place that I'm in, in Grand Rapids and the people that live here?*
>
> *It just broadens your view . . . and it forces you to be more of a well-rounded person . . . and so you're not as me-centered . . .*
>
> *My liberal arts education has shown me that it's important that I am involved with my community. I think in both taking up our role as citizen of the kingdom and citizens of the place we find ourselves in, I think that my liberal arts education has shown me various needs throughout Calvin, throughout Grand Rapids, throughout the U.S., and throughout the world.*

These comments reveal that one outcome of a liberal arts education for some students has been the development of empathy for others and the ability to think beyond themselves.

> *The liberal arts fostered an entire mentality that I'm not out to just get a job and be well-paid and whatnot but that it's actually important to be involved with other people and interacting with the community . . . [it taught me] what it is to care about other people and not simply be focused on your own goals or your own self-affirming actions . . .*

The message here seems to be that liberal arts education had a palpable, albeit general, benefit of helping foster not only a broadening of perspective but one in which the student saw him- or herself as less the center of things. The strength of a liberal arts education, from these responses, seemed to be the ability to break through the me-first individualism and self-serving strategic

interests that a student might have first brought to his or her educational experience as well as the ability to generate a sense that life ought to be oriented outward.

Another emergent theme was the benefit of the *integrative and theoretical character of the liberal arts*. Liberal arts helped students see the interconnectedness of the world and of knowledge.

> *I think with liberal arts education you learn a discipline, but you learn how the rest of the world is working too. You get the sense that the whole world is interconnected.*
>
> *[My core classes] opened my eyes to thinking [about] particular environmental problems and social problems as well.*
>
> *[My intro course in biology] helped me be a lot more, I don't know, just aware and concerned about my personal use of certain resources that we didn't have very much of . . .*

Further in, what seemed to be a surprise to the students themselves, the prototypically theoretical courses actually aided in understanding the particular and the local.

> *[Professor_____] ended up making it [philosophy] something that was so practical and applicable to our lives that it made it a lot more obvious that philosophy can help us become better people but also better at interacting with people or creation or place . . .*

This points to a tension in the liberal arts between the global and the local, the universal and the particular. On the one hand, the liberal arts often deal with issues in an abstract and global perspective, forcing the student into abstractions and broad thinking. The obvious benefit includes a theoretical perspective that gives the student a powerful set of analytic tools to think through a broad set of issues. However, the tension shows in the surprising notations about the often practical nature of some of these supposedly theoretical courses. By implication, we might conclude that students expect the usual result of liberal arts to be a focus on the global and universal with little attention paid to the local and particular. It might prepare students to be citizens of the world and think through global issues more than connecting to the particular, local issues of the more immediate surroundings.

A third theme was the general benefit of broadening one's perspective and gaining *a big picture understanding,* including learning how to think. Students made numerous comments describing how liberal arts education has been formative for them.

> *It teaches you how to think and how to live [and answer questions like]: What does it mean to be a citizen? Who am I? . . . The liberal arts have been so influential because it has allowed me to explore different disciplines and see these underlying themes throughout . . .*
>
> *What it brings is a more holistic perspective to what's going on and around the city.*
>
> *[The liberal arts] opened my eyes to see that it's really not only doctors that can help. A writer, for example, writing story about a family in need [can] spark a . . .response from people.*
>
> *A liberal arts education has given my experiences a broader context culturally, politically, and socially.*

The general story here seems to be that students feel that the liberal arts help students develop a broadened perspective on how to live generally and to see connections and opportunities that had not been considered before. When the liberal arts curriculum is a significant and central part of a student's education, even in a professional program, the curriculum impacts how students view the world and their place in it.

For current students the relationship between liberal arts and place (in particular, Grand Rapids as the city within which they are living) is expressed in cautiously positive terms. The cautiousness comes out in the focus on general benefits—a broadened perspective, a holism, increased thinking ability, a de-centering of self—rather than on the ability to articulate a list of particular, more tangible and immediate benefits. The nature of liberal arts is such that it is a set of general studies, embedded in disciplines that are themselves abstract and theoretical. The liberal arts, at Calvin, also emphasize the global and the universal. And so it would be of no surprise that the students' responses would reflect this. Yet they thought that the liberal arts contributed positively, in precisely that way, to their understanding of the particular and their possible involvements, if not embeddedness, in this particular place. The contrast between the general and the particular is a creative tension that is interesting and worthwhile.

Another important finding is that **place-based pedagogical strategies build an ethic of care among students.** *Academically based service-learning* is one strategy that has been quite successful at Calvin in fostering within students an ethic of care for particular people and particular places. At Calvin, we have seen rapid growth in the academically based service-learning program in recent years. Calvin faculty have contributed to the public discourse about higher education's connections to contemporary civic, social, economic, and moral problems through the 2002 publication of *Commitment and Connection: Service-Learning and Christian*

Higher Education. "Our experience has shown us that service-learning can be a bridge connecting faculty and students in concrete ways to issues and problems faced by people who, like us, struggle to make sense of their life experiences" (Heffner and Beversluis, eds. 2002, p.x).

During the student interviews many of the students commented on the value of the first-year orientation program Streetfest where they first encountered the college's commitment to its place and to the practice of service within it. Students noted that though this experience was generally a good introduction, it doesn't necessarily lead students to ongoing involvement in the larger community and the issues it faces. Those faculty who utilize academically based service-learning as a pedagogical strategy provide opportunities for students to become involved with community people or community organizations, and a number of students spoke about the impact this has had on them. These examples reveal something of the value the students themselves place on such experiences.

> *I had an English 101 course where we read a lot about New Urbanism, and we did interviewing for service-learning, and I really appreciated that. The concerns that I have about connecting with the neighborhood that I'm in now, have come from those kinds of educational experiences.*
>
> *I took a music and community class, and [we went] to different churches or schools and did interactive music sessions with people . . . so it was really neat to interact with people from all different backgrounds.*
>
> *I did a project with my social psychology class last fall with Safe Haven Ministries, which is a domestic-abuse shelter, and I'm actually still volunteering there now.*

Interviews with Calvin students regarding the students' perceptions of the existing connections between their college and its city revealed a range of patterns in responses. In general, students gave one of two responses to questions concerning the intersection of liberal arts and place depending on their background, current living situation, and experience with course work. Either students drew distinctions between the liberal arts and caring for a particular place, or they were able to articulate a unified understanding of the liberal arts and place. In other words, some described liberal arts as a balanced, well-rounded education but distinct from caring for issues and people in this place (such as, participation in the local economy or performing acts of service). Other students articulated a clear understanding of the connection between liberal arts and place.

> *[Without a set of liberal arts requirements], I wouldn't have gotten to take classes on sociology and geography and history and just a variety of classes*

> *that have forced me to think about where I live and forced me to care about [it].*
>
> *The most important lesson I understand about liberal arts education is that everything is connected, every field of study, every activity, everything. And liberal arts education encourages cultivating intellectual, personal growth in a wide variety of areas, and I guess that sort of cultivation needs to be applied. It's applied within the community of the school, but I think that there's a lot of valuable things that liberal arts education offers that would sort of have external benefits more, if that view is taken out of the classroom into the neighborhoods.*

Another pedagogical strategy that fosters an ethic of care within students is faculty *using the local place as a teaching tool.* Faculty members in various liberal arts disciplines have used this pedagogical strategy, and a number of students commented on the impact on their thinking and life. We will describe three quite different examples here. The first example is from a biology student.

> *I've been involved with the Plaster Creek watershed doing a floristic quality survey [of the plants] for one of my biology classes.*

The student went on to speak with enthusiasm about the findings of this research. Discovering rare plant species that no one knew about previously not only had an impact on the student, but it made a significant contribution to decision-makers working on the watershed management plan.

The second example describes the role of the Nursing Department in addressing childhood lead poisoning, which is a significant issue of public concern in Michigan and in the city of Grand Rapids. Grand Rapids has the second highest incidence of childhood lead poisoning in the state. A nursing student said:

> *Our professors work with the Get the Lead Out! coalition . . . so this year we're actually doing some lead assessments and doing some home teachings.*

Having faculty tie their teaching to specific issues of importance to the local area, such as childhood lead poisoning, leads students to think differently about their education and the importance of the work they do.

The third example is of a sculpture student who described a project his class worked on in urban Grand Rapids, and then the student described how this affected him.

> *There is a certain energy and excitement about the PLANT! project and [we have] ownership that this is our project. We are doing something important and something special . . . And at the same time, I have been able to apply to this sculpture project the reading that I did [in other classes].*

Some students articulate appreciation when they are able to see connections between the learning in one discipline or class and the learning in another. All these examples highlight the contribution to student learning that can be fostered when the particulars of place are used as teaching tools. Note some of these examples are described in more detail in the case studies that appear later in the white paper.

Students also articulate that their experiences in *sustained off-campus study* have contributed to their developing an ethic of care, and this was explained by students in several ways. One student described the empathy that she gained, upon her return home, for people living in the United States who are non-native speakers.

> *[Empathy] came mainly through my experience in Spain . . . The whole study-abroad thing was good for so many reasons . . . it gave me a much more accurate and compassionate perspective about other people who are struggling [to learn a new language in the United States].*

Another student connected what was learned in a core class in biology to issues experienced during a semester-abroad program and how this raised new questions upon returning to the United States.

> *My Biology 111 class [was a] core class . . . in particular, we spent some time talking about environmental issues that I had never really learned very much about before. And we did some stuff with global warming, but even also talking about, let's see, the amount of fresh water that's available in the world and . . . recognizing the problems and issues associated with that, I'd never been super aware of before . . . so the things that I had learned in my biology class helped open my eyes and make me more aware of the fact that even if I did have fresh water available to me here, there's no reason why I should be wasteful with that. And then being in [Europe], in that place where suddenly I didn't have that much fresh water available to me. It helped me understand more about, you know, like this <u>really</u> is a real problem.*

One key finding is that sustained off-campus study or experience, whether the *place* is near or far, can significantly contribute to students building an ethic of care.

> *When I was in Belize, we learned how to more fully articulate and develop the idea that if you feel an attachment to the place where you live it makes*

> *sense that you would want to take care of that place, serve it . . . and preserve it.*

These comments point to the value of students having a extended experience of off-campus study or off-campus work in a place new to them in order to be able to recognize and identify with the strengths and issues of their *own* place.

The third important finding evident in the student interviews is that **experience beyond the classroom fosters important connections, both to place and to people**. This can be seen in the comments students make about the influence particular faculty members have on them and in the choices students make about their living situation, their work, and their church commitments. *Faculty influence* cannot be underestimated. A number of students interviewed shared stories and examples of professors who encouraged them to think carefully about how to make important decisions regarding their life priorities and their ethical commitments. This influence includes what occurs in the classroom but also goes beyond, at times.

> *The reason that she [a Calvin professor] has had even more impact on me is because of the model that she has set in her life and allowing me and other students to get to know her on a more personal level.*

A few of the students told stories about observing their professors' lifestyles and noticing that they walked or rode bikes to work. Watching their professors arrive at school in this fashion caused some students to think about using public transportation or using their own cars less. In addition to faculty members serving as role models, some students described the mentoring role faculty members play in their lives.

> *She has encouraged me through her involvement in the community. We have talked a lot about social justice and things in Grand Rapids and figuring out how we can help here.*

The students noted that this personal out-of-the-classroom interaction had a strong influence on helping them determine their own ethical commitments.

Students also mentioned additional experiences beyond the classroom, such as, *work or church* involvements playing a role in fostering connections both to place and to people. For some, involvement in a local church was influential in their becoming involved in community issues.

> *[Cambridge] is a church that intentionally focuses on the community . . . and I want to be a part of it. And through the interactions and experiences there, I know I've grown.*
>
> *I became aware of issues in Grand Rapids through work at [Oxford Park] Church. They really push a lot of being involved not only in the community but in AIDS [work] and social justice and helping to recognize problems in the world.*

For others, where they have chosen to work has been influential in their forming important connections to place. One Grand Rapids native described an epiphany that coincided with the decision to leave college temporarily to work.

> *When I was a sophomore at Calvin, I dropped out of school, and I started an art gallery on Division Avenue downtown, and I lived above it with some friends. A couple of them were Calvin graduates, and some were Calvin students . . . I've been involved in the Division Avenue Arts Cooperative, the Heartside Promotions Community. I work at the Urban Institute of Contemporary Arts now. I was an intern. When I came back to Calvin, I was an intern for the RAPID, the Grand Rapids Transit Authority. I was involved with the Grand Valley Metro Council, so I've been involved with the community of people interested in working in Grand Rapids and also through that, involved with the neighborhood association where I lived.*

Some students also clearly came with *prior life experience* that influenced their predilection to concern themselves (or not) with place or with community. The most interesting cases in this theme were the students who had grown up in the same city as the college—Grand Rapids. These students seemed to be either foreclosed in their understanding of where the city's strengths and weaknesses were located, or they were very surprised and interested to be discovering areas, strengths, and resources within the city of which they had no prior knowledge. One Grand Rapids student discussed her reasons for not taking public transportation or visiting certain parks in stark terms of fear and danger. She noted that there are

> *. . . pockets of just not really great areas in Grand Rapids, like downtown, like Division, it gets kind of gross and shady and . . . they're doing a good job of starting to [improve] the kind of nasty areas, they're starting to revamp them and make them more, you know, people friendly . . . But I wouldn't want to walk there by myself or even just with another girlfriend or something, through my neighborhood, like towards the M.L. King Park side, after dark, I wouldn't do that . . .*

Students' prior experience and their stereotypes can lead them to become involved or to avoid becoming involved in their place.

It is noteworthy that a number of students referred to the impact of their c*hoice of living situation* as being influential in what matters to them. At Calvin College, most freshmen and sophomores live on campus in college-owned residence halls. Upper-level students have three choices—they can continue to live on campus in college-owned apartments, they can move off campus to a college-owned apartment complex close to campus, or they can move off campus into a neighborhood. In our study, we identified students' choice of living situation as one of the strongest factors determining their awareness of city issues and their articulation of ethical commitments and civic engagement. For students who lived on campus throughout their college experience, their perceptions of the existing connections between their college and its city were somewhat limited. Students frequently used the image of a bubble to describe the feeling of always being on the campus, and this sentiment was almost universally used in a negative light.

> *As cute as it is that it's a bubble, it's also nice to get out—pop it.*

For students who chose to move off campus, their perspectives on the city and region changed significantly.

> *The simple fact of moving off campus made me much more aware of what Grand Rapids is like, what its assets are and what its downfalls are.*

A few students articulated a relationship between their place and their habits and choices. Particularly students who were experiencing a larger percentage of their average day in urban environments understood that the images and places that they more frequently saw were more likely to enter their consciousness as places and communities to care for and about. Living off campus can be a broadening experience for most students. Proximity can build understanding and empathy.

> *I lived on campus, and everything I needed or everything that I did was either on campus or somewhere near campus. When I moved off campus as a junior, that connection [to the city] became much more obvious and important.*
>
> *I think that once you move off campus and you get plugged into a neighborhood ,you realize: I'm living on this street, and I've got a single mom and her two kids next to me. What can I do to interact with them?*
>
> *If you want to learn about someone you actually have to live where they are.*

As the students noted, proximity to issues within the city, like poverty or education, was an important factor in their developing a sense of care for these issues and transferring that care into action.

Interestingly, the students we interviewed who grew up in the Grand Rapids area, but were currently living in the on-campus housing, were less aware of city issues and were less involved in the city than students who currently lived off campus. Among the students who lived off campus, awareness of city issues and involvement in the city increased as their location was further from campus.

Alternatively, some students articulated a sense in which the stress and burdens of their academic and personal lives "within the bubble" precluded them from taking full care and responsibility for any particular place outside the bubble, as engaged citizens within their communities. These comments reveal the impact a student's living situation has on his or her understanding of a place and its people, of what is important and what is insignificant, and what demands a response and what can be ignored. It is interesting to note that alumni often made similar comments—that where they chose to live during college had an impact on their perceptions, their attitudes, and their decisions as to whether or not to take action on any particular issue.

We have seen through these in-depth student interviews that several key themes dominate the findings.

- The liberal arts core curriculum, not merely the student's major, is critical to the formation of an ethical stance to care for a particular place and particular people.
- Understanding the particularities of one place enables students to recognize connections to other places, issues, and people and helps students to build an ethic of care.
- Experiences beyond the classroom, including living, working, and worshipping off campus in the city, greatly increase most students' understanding of larger issues and foster empathy and further inquiry.

These student interviews offer insights for liberal arts colleges interested in building future leaders who will act with knowledge, skills, and virtues to work towards a more equitable society.

Alumni Interviews: Setting the Stage for Living out Life Commitments in Their Particular Communities

More than forty Calvin College alumni were interviewed to explore their understanding of the role that their liberal arts education played in their own lives and in the formation of their commitments to place. We also explored the role liberal arts colleges play within a particular place—city or community. The alumni interviewed represent various age groups, racial and ethnic backgrounds, and both genders, offering diverse perspectives on liberal arts education. The findings described in this section are organized under three broad themes which emerged in the alumni interviews: the benefits of a liberal arts education at Calvin, the limitations or barriers of a liberal arts education at Calvin, and the opportunities available upon which to capitalize. See Appendix C for a bulleted summary of key themes uncovered.

The alumni interviewed in this part of the study claimed that **liberal arts education offers unique benefits which can foster a sense of place.** The benefits of liberal arts education at Calvin College, particularly where benefits related to community engagement, are often intertwined with a Reformed Christian worldview. Alumni report that all disciplines were equally valued—from the arts to the sciences—leading to a *broad view of life*. Alumni described how their liberal arts educational experience at Calvin College helped them see *the interconnected nature of reality* as understood both from a liberal arts approach and through a Reformed understanding of creation. This foundation helps these alumni understand the context within which they live, and this foundation was described by several alumni as "understanding your place in the world."

This interconnectedness and understanding of context could be described as a generally broadening influence from the study of history, psychology, religion, and science, and how these studies are interrelated. Another theme that arose from the interviews is that alumni clearly saw that their liberal arts education gave them the tools they need to learn how to learn or to become *lifelong learners.*

> *I feel like the education I got at Calvin, uh, trained me to be a lifelong learner. You know, the exposure to math, to science as well as to the softer history and political science and sociology gave me a taste of all those; that can prepare me for whatever the future is.*

Another benefit consistently articulated by alumni was the role and *impact of the core curriculum* at Calvin which not only gave them a broad understanding of the world and of their context but

also gave them *understanding with a purpose*. This purpose-driven learning is what made it difficult to separate Calvin's liberal arts and the Reformed Christian perspective. Underlying a Reformed Christian perspective is the honoring of all vocations and explorations—this is seen in the alumni group's clear experience that all subjects of study were valued. This also translates into a clear sense that all vocations are sacred callings, whether one is a banker or community organizer. Alumni stated consistently that they felt that everything they did for work or service had significance for the world. Thus values were integrated with learning—the integration of knowledge, the broadening of understanding, meant responsibilities are understood, for example, in terms of stewardship, justice, treatment of employees, and decision making related to where to live. The *liberal arts education had a clear purpose tied to a sense of responsibility and social change*. For example, one alumnus said she was taught a way of thinking that led her to see herself not just as a bank president but also as a community leader. A strong sense of responsibility came with her liberal arts education.

> *In my position that I am in, I have responsibilities to the community. And I serve on thirteen boards in the community. I do a lot of nonprofit work . . . And so I spend a lot of time today, because of my position, in the community working on making this a better place to be. I also think that it is part of my responsibility as an employer that I make this a good community for the folks that work here, and that is an obligation that I have to my eighteen hundred employees.*

It was clear that alumni felt that even those liberal arts courses that can be quite abstract and non-contextualized were taught in such a way as to connect with everyday choices. Philosophy was not seen as detached but rather involved foundational thinking that was necessary to frame decisions on the concrete outworking of a normative way of seeing the world—*the connection between worldview/beliefs and living/doing/being in the world.* This underlying viewpoint, that what you believe makes an impact on what you do, may or may not be unique to Calvin College**.**

An important component to the integration of worldview and "living and doing" was the impact of alumni seeing *faculty live out this worldview in a day-to-day way*—whether it was serving on the city council, starting the Grand Rapids recycling program, being involved in neighborhood organizations and local nonprofits, or becoming active at the state or national level. As one alumnus stated, a liberal arts education at Calvin was "education with a heart" which connected to what the hands were being asked to do. There is significant evidence from these alumni interviews that a *Christian liberal arts education has led alumni to be dispersed and active in all kinds of sectors of the city and region* (and beyond!) These alumni interviews suggest that one of

the benefits of a liberal arts education is that it can foster a commitment to and a sense of responsibility to particular places.

Liberal arts colleges, such as Calvin College, face certain barriers or limitations in relation to place. Some are unique to this particular institution while others are applicable to higher education in general. Calvin College and the city of Grand Rapids no doubt have much to offer each other. However, a pervasive sentiment in many of the interviews seemed to be the sense that barriers existed between these two entities. Multiple respondents seemed to articulate ideas that certain walls existed between the college and the surrounding community. In some cases these barriers were a complex milieu of sociological and psychological reasons. In others, it was a much more palpable understanding of a *physical, geographical separation of the campus.*

That physical separation seemed to have its historical underpinnings in the move of the college's campus fifty years ago from an urban residential neighborhood to a farm at the periphery of the city. The city eventually extended itself to include the new campus, and suburbs grew up around the remaining perimeter of the college. It should be noted, though, multiple respondents indicated that the timing of the departure—in close proximity to white flight from Grand Rapids—sent bad messages on behalf of the college. These respondents articulated that despite plausible arguments for space-needs for the growing institution, it still looked to some insiders, and many more outsiders, that the college was abandoning the city.

Moreover, in the fifty years that the college has resided in its newer location, the college has remained somewhat isolated from the neighborhoods surrounding it. In other words, the college is physically insular. There are gates, trees, and roads that seem to convey a message of remoteness from the larger community. More than one respondent indicated that the college functioned within a suburban bubble. Whether intentional or not, the physical location and design of the Calvin College campus is perceived by many of the respondents to function as a barrier between the institution and the city.

Beyond physical isolation, interviewees also indicated that when the institution attempted to develop relationships with certain neighborhoods, it was *never seen as a serious stakeholder*. Those who lived and worked in the communities in question understood the college to be a participant in certain projects but that they would not be a serious, long-standing stakeholder in the neighborhood. In other words, Calvin's participation ended when the semester, academic year, or project came to a conclusion. In essence, the *transient nature of college life*—both in terms of students and rootless faculty—left community partners somewhat suspicious of college

involvement in their neighborhoods and programs. This contributes to the perception that the college is *poor at partnership and collaboration.*

The problem of transience, though, is generalizable to almost all institutions of higher learning. It should be noted, as well, that respondents to this study also indicated that Calvin College was encumbered by its own unique barriers. Interviewees frequently articulated that the *college's ethnic and religious identity* often was perceived by the larger community as a rigid devotion that could best be described as a conversation stopper. Some perceive the college to be *intolerant to difference*. For instance, some respondents wondered how the college could claim to have much invested in the city when its faculty requirements made public education verboten. These types of issues also fed into another barrier: *perceptions of elitism*. Respondents frequently indicated their assumption that members of the larger community perceived Calvin College as a center of elitism that was not interested in dirtying itself with the problems of the city, or when the college does get involved, its *connection to the city is often based on charity perceptions.* This perception, accurate or not, was compounded by the notion that other colleges and universities in the area were more adeptly inserting themselves into community issues, so Calvin suffers from *low visibility within the city* as a significant community partner.

In the end, the two most dominant barriers, as articulated by the interviewed Calvin College alums, could best be described as physical isolation and negative outside perception. It should be noted that the college is addressing the former by establishing a presence downtown with new art studios and galleries and the purchase of the Ladies Literary Club building. The case of addressing the latter may be more difficult. It may require some kind of campaign to publicly acknowledge much of the good work that has, is, and will occur in Grand Rapids under the auspices of the college. The specific barriers that Calvin faces may resonate with other liberal arts colleges. The historical precedent for many liberal arts colleges is that they are isolated and unconcerned about the people and issues beyond their campus, but this is changing.

Liberal arts colleges face particular opportunities for future growth and development within their place. A number of themes emerged during the alumni interviews which could be embraced as opportunities. The first notable finding is that there needs to be a *growing awareness of how the city enriches the college.* Some alumni seemed to hold a rather vague understanding of the importance of a college connecting with its city. Even using the phrase "connecting with the city" lacked definition and clarity. Some comments revealed a charity mentality—that is, that the college should do more for the community—but not a clear sense of what that means or why this

is necessary. On the other hand, some articulated the need for a greater recognition and acknowledgement of what the city has to offer, which does and can enrich the college. This poses a challenge for a college, like Calvin, which tends to not see itself as being needy. One respondent argued:

> *I think it's been rare for me to be working with Calvin professors . . . in a community situation or a project situation where you don't feel that they feel that they could do it better if they were in charge . . . somehow, Calvin has to be needy . . . but what does Calvin need from the community that would really make it better? [If you ask that question you might have] a hard time finding people that would come up with something significant.*

So a liberal arts college needs to build more awareness of what it needs from the larger community and then be able to identify its own self-interest in the growth and development of the college/community connection.

Some alumni argued that *the college needs to be a physical presence downtown* so that the city's concerns actually become the concerns of the college as well. This was articulated by some alumni as a counter balance to the geographical isolation that the college's location has created.

> *I think the college should have a distinct physical presence somewhere in the central city . . . It's already doing a little bit with the art faculty on South Division Avenue . . . I think the college needs to take that model, that sort of engagement, and write that much bigger. The college would do very well to have some form of facility where it can offer classes, where faculty members might . . . hold offices, particularly those faculty that are engaged in some sort of sabbatical research that has to do with the city, broadly defined . . . But there's a tremendous skill base within the faculty, and I don't presume to know how much they're engaged today, but . . . to whatever level they're engaged today, it's not enough.*

This comment confirms and builds on what others have said about the important contributions faculty members can make in helping the college to do a better job of *being in the public square*.

Some alumni expressed an opportunity for Calvin to *make strategic long-term commitments and to become better collaborators* on issues of mutual concern. Liberal arts colleges have a tremendous opportunity to deepen faculty teaching and scholarship, if they identify the key strengths and challenges their city or community faces. The colleges can then carefully and strategically plan a course of action to be engaged in, in addressing these issues. Several alumni spoke about *the changing regional economy and wondered how the academic resources of a liberal arts college can be brought to bear on this conversation.* One particular challenge for

most liberal arts college faculty is that the teaching-load leaves little time for community engagement, unless creative ways are found to connect this work with the teaching and research demands faculty members face. Finding ways to have college representatives at decision-making tables that influence the direction of city and regional issues can also be a challenge. For example, in this area, there is a growing conversation about regional planning, and the West Michigan Strategic Alliance has been created to be a catalyst for regional collaboration to make West Michigan the best place to live, learn, work, and play in the Midwest. Local liberal arts colleges are not intimately involved in these conversations, but they could play a significant role since colleges do have a vested interest in the economic, political, cultural, and social strength of their region.

Other alumni spoke about particular challenges in neighborhoods and raised concerns about *how a college interacts with its immediate, surrounding neighborhood* in ways that are mutually beneficial and reciprocal, rather than exploitive. Some alumni suggested that the college has a unique educational opportunity to embody its mission by *focusing on upper-level students who live off campus* in city neighborhoods and by fostering in the students a care for the place and the people who are their neighbors.

There are a myriad of ways a college or university could become involved in its place. The alumni interviewed, generated a long list of possibilities which could be applicable in almost any institution of higher education. Their list includes inviting the larger community to the campus more; encouraging community groups and residents to use the college's facilities; conducting survey research for community groups; collaborating more closely with the public schools; providing English as a Second Language (ESL) services and training or serving as Spanish translators; and networking and partnering with other local colleges and universities.

The key is for liberal arts colleges to identify the most important issues facing their city or region and then to work at fostering long-term, mutually beneficial ways for the college to play its particular part to address these issues. Liberal arts colleges need to *find ways to be a presence* in the place where they are embedded. The case studies described later in this paper provide ideas and suggestions for making this a reality.

City/Community Leaders' Interviews: Resources from the Liberal Arts Tradition That Enliven and Enrich City Life

Group interviews were conducted with twenty city and community leaders representing all sectors including government, business, education, social services, urban and regional planning, health care, and nonprofit organizations. The respondents attended colleges and universities all over the country and had vastly different experiences of higher education. These interviews explored how the liberal arts actually shaped their perspectives and prepared them to become leaders in this place. Our goal was to determine how community leaders envisioned their own educational experiences as having an impact on their connections to place and how their own education and experience led them to care about their community. We also explored their views of the contributions liberal arts colleges make to the common good and whether liberal arts colleges are important to the vitality of a city or region. We wanted to explore how a particular place could influence and shape the way liberal arts faculty teach and do scholarship. The findings reveal that these community leaders identified their own liberal arts experiences as being influential and as important (if not more so) as technical training in preparing them for their vocational work. Faculty members were identified as playing a critical role both as resource people for a community and as models for students. These community leaders identified a role for liberal arts colleges to be strategic partners but admit that they are often overlooked. See Appendix D for a bulleted summary of key themes uncovered.

Liberal arts education is foundational in preparing leaders for their future vocational work. Community leaders in these interviews described many strengths of a liberal arts education, even if the liberal arts tradition was not part of their own experience. Liberal arts colleges draw a diverse set of people and skills to a community, and these respondents claimed that liberal arts students tend to be *more inquisitive* and demonstrate *more intellectual curiosity*. Because of their broad background liberal arts students usually develop *critical thinking skills*—the ability to *learn how to learn*—and they often become lifelong learners. One respondent argued that his liberal arts courses prepared him better for his profession than the technical courses he was required to take.

> *My degree is criminal justice, but I think my most instructive courses were lit courses because I figure anybody can learn the criminal justice system, just get the job, and learn it. It's just a system; it's a technical thing. But the idea of exploring human motivations and dreams and how conflicts run and why people decide—I mean, that's the realm of literature. And I always felt that I got much more preparation for my corrections career through my English lit courses than I ever did through my CJ classes. So that's one point. And the other point—I mean, your questions about the role of liberal arts in a*

> *broader community, as a broader community resource. I think it's related to critical thinking, which is maybe what we're starting to talk about.*

Several respondents commented that when they hire, they give preference to those from a liberal arts background because their *ability to see issues from multiple perspectives* and to *facilitate dialogue on controversial issues* can be a huge asset in the work place. One respondent argued that one role of the liberal arts was to help people focus on becoming involved—the issue is less important than the *principle of being involved*—that is the transferable skill.

> *But, I think, there's a different way to look at it, and to me, the role is that rather than focusing on the particular issue, what you focus on is the principle of being involved in the issue around you, which is then transferable.*

Some respondents described their own experience as liberal arts students and articulated that the most important learning for them was discovering that "*you could impact change."* Respondents described various ways that their liberal arts education helped them learn how to *create social change in a particular place*. Other respondents described the role of *experiential education* within their college experience as being instrumental in enabling them to gain a vision for how knowledge is connected to action and of how the study of multiple disciplines is beneficial in forming leaders who can both analyze (e.g., view the world from broad perspectives) and take steps to link their knowing with doing. Other respondents claimed there are advantages *that a community receives* when students, during their student years, become involved in issues of importance to the place.

> *There's a payback, I think, to it, too, to get them as undergraduates involved in the community, learning about community, having the personal experiences, breaking down some stereotypes—It's a real learning situation for them, and I'm sure that can be replicated on and on and on [in other places, too].*

City and community leaders in these interviews claimed that **faculty members can play a critical role as resource people for a community and as models for students.** Many told stories from their own college or university experiences of particular faculty member's involvement in projects within their respective communities and of the positive impact they observed. Some described the dramatic turn in the last decade of colleges understanding that they are a part of a community and that the college has a responsibility *to* and a role to play *within* the community. One elected official in these interviews said, *"There's a good and, I think, a growing*

awareness among faculty members of their place and their involvement in the community." Some respondents compared different colleges and universities in terms of how visible their faculty members were in the larger community, both locally and nationally. Others used strong language to suggest that *faculty members can be an important resource to impact a community.*

> *That's why when I think about . . . liberal arts colleges, I'm thinking of the phenomenal resources that are there in the faculty . . . and their potential impact on this community.*

Numerous respondents commented on the mentoring role their own faculty members played in helping them develop a deeper understanding of the need for civic and community involvement. *These city leaders advocated for the key role faculty members play in modeling community engagement for their students*. Those who made the most lasting impression were those who connected the theoretical content of the courses they taught to experiences beyond the classroom.

> *There were some key professors that I had that were mentors or models for me, that went beyond just teaching in the classroom, clearly sharing their own experience in the community and the field. But it was those professors who took us out of the classroom, into the community, took us on tours and such . . . I gravitated to that. I think they were the best models to me.*

> *There were a few faculty that I recall . . . that modeled that type of community engagement . . . And they used their experience . . . and translated that into classroom teachings, and encouraged us, or encouraged me, at least, to similarly get involved in our community as well, whether it be in politics or in public administration . . . And that was very helpful. And so I recall that and how they related their experiences in what they were doing in their work, life and . . . that was really just interesting to me to see how these things were shaped, and within the political context, how they really get developed. And I took interest in that and . . . how they got the community engaged in that process, and it was enlightening in many ways that what I was perceiving was not an anomaly, but it happens all over the place, and that was helpful to know.*

Some respondents described the struggle that students often have making the transition from being a student to being a professional while still trying to stay involved in the larger community. One respondent suggested that colleges need to do more to help students learn how to stay connected to the larger community despite the transition from being a student to being a professional.

> *I don't think colleges do a good job of helping students transition into whatever the real world is, you know, into that career, and how do you transition from a student into a professional and still figure how to balance—*

> *how do I continue to stay connected to my community and make the changes or find my niche or my passion, you know, and stay connected to a community? And I think that's really where we really lose a lot of people after college, is that we don't do a good job of helping them transition into a professional career and still staying connected to a community.*

Another topic which emerged during the interviews with community leaders was the role liberal arts colleges do play and could play in the larger community. **Liberal arts colleges could be a strategic partner in a community,** but colleges are not always recognized as having a contribution to make.

Some respondents suggested that liberal arts colleges are a resource upon which to draw. In each interview with these city leaders, two specific initiatives were mentioned as evidence that liberal arts colleges are involved in active and planned ways in this region—Get the Lead Out!, a community collaborative working to address childhood lead poisoning in the county, and the Community Sustainability Partnership, a diverse network of community organizations in West Michigan who are working together to restore environmental integrity, improve economic prosperity, and promote social equity. Both of these initiatives have captured the attention of liberal arts colleges, and they are involved in various capacities within these projects.

> *Here locally, the colleges can play and do play a really critical part in their community . . . You look at Get the Lead Out! Some of the great partnerships they've had with the colleges and the incredible work they've done with our community because of that kind of support.*

However, there was no broad consensus among these community leaders that liberal arts colleges actually are strategic partners in addressing issues of concern for the city and region. *When strategic alliances are being formed to address the critical issues the city is facing, liberal arts colleges are not always thought of as having a contribution to make, and they are often not invited to the table.* This suggests that liberal arts colleges may need to make clearer the contributions they could make, whether it is through faculty research, student service-learning, or college-wide institutional support.

> *[A liberal arts college is] a resource. It's on the list that you'd go to. But where do they have strategic alliances that address . . . the critical issues that face the city's life, and who tends to get pulled around tables . . . because of what they bring to the situation? I don't see the colleges, the liberal arts colleges, there as much.*

For colleges and universities to make a genuine contribution, they need to identify their own self-interest in working on a particular issue; otherwise, their involvement can be patronizing or charity-driven which prevents a meaningful and reciprocal working relationship from being established.

Part of the conversation in these interviews led to a discussion of whether a college should initiate and provide leadership on particular issues or whether being responsive to requests for support and assistance from city and community leaders is adequate. Respondents argued with one another and in the end agreed that *colleges need to be both responsive when asked to contribute to particular needs and also to take the initiative and provide leadership on some issues.* A number of respondents felt that liberal arts colleges have a particular role to play in the public education system whether it be developing pre-college experiences for urban youth or tutoring or enrichment classes.

> *I do think that the liberal arts colleges locally, they do and they can play an incredible part in strengthening community, particularly in areas where there's not a lot of resources. One area, I think, that colleges do play a role, and should play a much larger role, is around education especially in an urban area like Grand Rapids. There are kids, so many kids that I work with every single day, who have had terrible experiences academically, and not only can they not even imagine themselves going to college, they don't even know what college begins to look like. And how do we reach out to kids as they grow up, how do we not only support them, but start to teach them how to think for themselves and give them options? There's so many opportunities and college can be this wonderful experience, and this is what it looks like, and how do we demystify it and make it less scary and make it seem attainable and help them academically?*

Another significant strand of the conversations in these interviews was the need for collaboration. *Collaboration is very important but difficult to accomplish.* Some respondents suggested that the liberal arts colleges in our city and region are not working together successfully and continue to work in "silos." However, these respondents suggested that collaborative work could make all entities stronger. Other respondents spoke about collaboration as something they wished the liberal arts colleges would demonstrate for the benefit of the larger society and spoke about collaboration as important in their own work, suggesting that colleges need to help teach this skill to students.

> *I think it'd be very helpful as a demonstration—if these colleges can do it, certainly governments can do it with churches, with businesses, and so forth because all these entities that we have, these institutions that we have in our community that have a lot of resource individually—but could be even better*

> *collectively. I think that would be a great outcome of collaborative work with or among the colleges and universities we have here. The other is to teach students as well how to truly form a collaborative partnership, that's critical because there's nothing that I've done that doesn't involve that ability. And it's not about competition so much as it is about partnership.*

These interviews with city and community leaders offer insights for understanding the unique contributions a liberal arts education makes in forming people with a vision for a life of service in a wide variety of sectors. The interviews also offer insights as to how a focus on place within the liberal arts tradition is not limiting but actually creates an expansive context for the integration of learning and practice.

Conclusion

The participants in this study offered multiple perspectives on the importance of emphasizing place in liberal arts education. Faculty articulated that an emphasis on place offers opportunities to enlarge the scholarly imagination. Interviews with students indicated that place-based pedagogical strategies within the liberal arts curriculum deepened their understanding of theoretical course content and fostered within them an ethic of care. Alumni identified how their liberal arts education benefited them in preparing to be active community leaders with a concern for their place, but alumni also described the limitations and barriers liberal arts colleges face and suggested ways for liberal arts colleges to become strategic partners in their communities. City and community leaders illustrated how the students and faculty from liberal arts institutions make valuable contributions to a place and offered challenges for liberal arts colleges to consider if they hope to broaden their impact.

This study demonstrates that liberal arts colleges can have both a global and a local impact if they are intentional and visionary. As one faculty member said, "We are realizing that caring about place and being locally involved is a transferable skill. So we may not be educating students to [only] care about or to stay in Grand Rapids, but we hope that we're opening students' eyes to the complexity of systemic issues, environmental issues, just social structures throughout, and teaching them to love it, but also teaching them to care about it. So we're hoping that caring about particularity, the particulars of a place, transfers in a much more global way."

Practicing Liberal Arts and Place: Case Studies

In this section we share case studies of projects which have been developed in a wide variety of liberal arts disciplines which intersect liberal arts and place. In each case study the author describes the project created, its relevance to the course being taught, and a brief bibliography of appropriate theory and research which links traditional liberal arts content with the specific local issue(s). Suggestions have been included for potential course placement for each case study, and pedagogical suggestions have been included to foster students' learning and engagement. Most case studies include suggestions about how to involve community leaders in the design of the project. Our hope is that these case studies will promote creativity, foster dialogue and critique, and encourage faculty at liberal arts colleges to consider the strengths, issues, and needs particular to their place as they undertake their teaching and research. We welcome questions, comments and suggestions and have included contact information for the authors of each of these case studies. The case studies are presented by discipline and can be found in the following order:

Philosophy—Urban Altruism: Learning to Love Our Neighbor(hood)s

Education/Anthropology—Social Structures and Education as a Social Enterprise

Art/ Sculpture—PLANT!

Communications—Listening to Community Voices

Sociology—Connecting Students and Neighborhood Master Planning

Sociology—Developing World Citizens: Learning to Listen to the Voices of the Poor

Physical Education and Recreation—Using Walking and Biking Tours to Connect Students to Place

Biology—Service-Learning Partnerships with Local Elementary Schools: Creating Native Wildflower Gardens

Biology—"Food For Thought": Global Health, Environment, and Sustainability

Nursing— Transforming a Nursing Department by Emphasizing Place and Partnership

Nursing— *Get the Lead Out!* Retailer Survey

Geography/Environmental Studies—Calvin Environmental Assessment Program (CEAP)

Co-curricular—Intentional Student Communities: Project Neighborhood, Pamoja House, Our Place

Urban Altruism: Learning to Love Our Neighbor(hood)s

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Description

In the spring of 2006 I taught a senior-level seminar entitled Seeking the Welfare of the City: Urban Altruism and Loving our Neighbor(hood)s. The course drew students from a range of disciplines including philosophy, sociology, international development, religion, and others. The focus of the course was to reflect on the material conditions of community—that is, how concrete, material aspects such as urban planning, architecture, and other physical aspects of social arrangement either contribute to or detract from altruism (which we defined as "other-regarding concern"). This involved high-level theoretical considerations in philosophy and theology as well as engagements with social science literature on urban and suburban social arrangements.

A key aspect of the course was a service-learning component which required students to do two things: (1) to serve a community organization in the city with specific interest in fostering other-regarding concern (or community in the social sense); and (2) to work as teams to create a specific proposal for a policy or initiative in the city of Grand Rapids that would contribute to community-building in our neighborhoods. Students presented their initiatives in poster formats. We then worked with Rosalynn Bliss, city commissioner for the 2nd Ward, to display the posters at City Hall and thus communicate the proposals to key city leaders.

Transferability

The Urban Altruism project is almost universally transferable and could even be translated into "rural" versions. The key intuition of the course is to draw on classic liberal arts disciplines like philosophy, theology, and sociology to consider how and why our material surroundings (the built-environment) shape community—in positive or negative ways. The constructive aspect of the course is then to consider how to combat the increasing social atomism of late modern culture (the "bowling alone" phenomenon) by proposing how the material conditions might be changed to foster increased altruism or other-regarding concern.

Each place (neighborhood, city, even region) will have different challenges and opportunities in this respect. The foundational nature of the liberal arts reflection generates a kind of theoretical consideration which can then be put to work in different ways in different contexts. Faculty, students, and institutions can marshal different connections and kinds of social capital to produce community outcomes and garner community investment. While the unique nature of Calvin meant the institution could harness the social capital of urban congregations and nonprofit agencies, other liberal arts colleges can play their strengths and work through other sorts of channels.

Pedagogical Components

The analysis and work of the course culminated in a *concluding team assignment* intended to bring together three things: (1) theoretical work in the humanities (philosophy, theology); (2) research in the social sciences (sociology, urban planning); and (3) on-the-ground interest in the specificity of the city of Grand Rapids. In short, the goal was to aim our liberal arts learning and bring it to bear upon specific challenges and issues in the neighborhoods of Grand Rapids. The project was communicated as follows to the students:

> The goal is to explore a particular aspect of "urban altruism" relative to Grand Rapids (e.g., urban planning policies, local economics initiatives, neighborhood association planning, community church programs, the creation of "urban sanctuaries," or innovative "everyday" practices). Your research will identify and analyze any current practices, programs, or policies that foster urban altruism, but more importantly your task will be to identify gaps that present opportunities for new initiatives. Each group's research, based on sound social science, will recommend a new initiative in the relevant sector that will foster urban altruism. Research will be presented in a poster format which will be displayed in a public space in Grand Rapids (hopefully City Hall), and then posted on the course website.

Students met in teams to identify a problem/challenge, propose a project, consider its feasibility (assuming very limited budget resources), research the issues (including attention to issues of material conditions, built-environment, community-building, etc.), and then construct a poster that would clearly specify the problem, communicate and demonstrate the viability of the constructive proposal, and convince stakeholders to marshal the resources to implement the proposal.

Community Involvement and Investment

Beyond generating concrete proposals for improving altruism in the community, we sought to serve and involve the community in two specific ways:

We contacted one of the city commissioners and asked if we could display the poster proposals at City Hall so that city leaders could see and consider the proposals. We were permitted to exhibit the posters in the main lobby of City Hall for two weeks, garnering significant exposure for the project. (The exhibit also received television news coverage.)

We shared the results of student research via the course website at http://www.calvin.edu/~jks4/city/seminar.html. This included literature reviews written by students as well as downloadable versions of the poster proposals.

Course Placement

Urban Altruism was an interdisciplinary course that could easily be housed in a number of departments, including philosophy, religious studies, sociology, or art departments with architecture or pre-architecture programs.

Literature Cited

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For further information, email the author at kjs4@calvin.edu.

Complete resources related to the course—including syllabus, assignments, online articles and readings, and group project posters—are available on the seminar website at http://www.calvin.edu/~jks4/city/seminar.html.

Social Structures and Education as a Social Enterprise

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Introduction

IDIS 205 is sociology of education course designed to use sociological theory as a foundation to examine the interaction between education and the other systems and institutions (e.g., political, economic, and cultural) that shape society. Particular attention is given to the impacts of race, class, and gender on society and schooling and enabling students to see those impacts at work in the world around them. To that end, at the heart of the course is a community-based research project that provides an opportunity to examine these issues in real-life contexts, while also serving as an introduction to social science research methods. A Christian lens shapes our critical analysis of society and society's interaction with education.

Projects' Relevance to the Course

Through course materials, and particularly the research assignment, it is my desire for each student to become equipped—to *identify* various theoretical constructs and research methods that illuminate social structures and cultural practices; to *describe* the basic functions and influences of America's major social, economic, and political institutions, including cultural and socio-economic status; to *summarize and analyze* the causes and consequences of social injustices, along with the processes and consequences of social change and the role of education (and ourselves) as agents of change; to *design* a research project using qualitative and/or quantitative methods to reveal and examine these issues in a local context; and to *articulate* how a Christian perspective might inform a social science understanding of society and the role we might have in transforming education into a social enterprise that works for the betterment of communities and society as a whole.

Description of Project

The community-based research project asks each student to start with their own lives, experiences and interests to develop a social science research question that is cross cultural (the cross-cultural element does not have to be expressed in the topic but can be meet by simply making at least one

of the populations to be studied of a culture other than the student's). Students have the option of working alone or in groups to develop that question into a research project by identifying the most appropriate methods and population for the study. These portions of the project are completed within the first four weeks of class and become integrated into the course introduction and the forming of a learning community (Palmer, 1998).

After we have had some time together as a class discussing social theory, research practice, issues of the impact researchers have on anything they study, and the importance of building relationships as a foundation for data gathering and analysis, students then must settle on a location for their study. The requirements of the project ask students to spend at least twenty hours over the course of the semester at their research site and that before they do any data collecting, students must simply spend time getting a sense of the place and people. They are free to find their own locations, but most require assistance.

An increase in the relationship I and the campus have with local community leaders would serve to strengthen the meaningfulness of the projects. As those continue to be developed, I work in collaboration with our service-learning center and with relationships I have fostered in a number of local communities and organizations, to place all students in a locale specific to their question. For example, a pair of students was interested in exploring how hope is articulated by the homeless and thus sought a placement at a local homeless shelter. These students volunteered over the course of the semester, working increasingly more closely with the population of the shelter. After several weeks, the students felt as if they had developed enough trust and relationships to begin asking questions about hope. To their surprise a number of folks they had meet invited the students to their "homes" revealing parts of the city to the students that they had never known. After the semester ended each student continued to volunteer at the shelter.

Pedagogical Implications

Throughout the semester, the project becomes a touchstone to provide examples for our class discussions of social issues, the project assists in illumining the complexity of social institutions and practices, and the project helps students find their own voice and place in the midst of it all. Toward the end of the semester the students read a book by Jonathon Kozol which often mirrors the experiences and questions students have faced in their own projects. That linkage serves to both assist students in articulating and finding meaning in what they are seeing and feeling and provides a model for a life of community engagement. For our students, who are largely White and upper middle class, the community piece also enables students to see what may first appear

as mere theory and distant issues residing in their community as well as to see that their actions can bring change, change that starts with themselves (Koliba, 2000).

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PLANT!

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Project conceived by Ben Schaafsma

Introduction

PLANT! functions as a final, collaborative project for classes in the visual arts, particularly sculpture or advanced problem solving. The PLANT! project is suitable for all levels of sculpture, and in the case of its implementation at Calvin College, a combination of levels (introduction, intermediate, and advanced) can all participate simultaneously. The project is only suitable for spring semester courses, as it requires outside activities and engagement. The PLANT! project develops a number of neighborhood-centric sites that become converted from unused space to urban gardens. These sites act as vehicles for the participants to better understand place in terms of geography, topography, history, science, the environment, emotions, and situations. By maintaining this urban or suburban garden, whether the participants chose to grow flowers, herbs, vegetables, or simply their ideas, the consistency of being located within particularity, allows the participants to engage this new place in some meaningful way. The specificity of being located in this way also emphasizes the liberal arts project, by integrating disciplines, by conflating theory and practice and lifestyle, and by arranging a very healthy dialogue between the academic and the civic.

Description of Project

The format of the project is as follows: students in the class divide into groups of three each. Ideally the three members of the group live in fairly close proximity to each other, as the idea of the groups is to be neighborhood based. Groups can vary in size depending on class size, but three seems to be the ideal target. Once students have formed the groups, each group begins to explore the neighborhoods in which they reside, in search of unused or neglected spaces. These dormant spaces will eventually be transformed into working spaces, by means of group involvement. Groups will pick their location based on some of the following considerations: visibility, accessibility, history, use, etc. Calvin students discovered a wide range of unused

spaces from vacant lots to train tracks, from community centers to downtown intersections. The variance in site character contributes to the overall complexity of the project. In preparation for searching for these sites, class discussions center on psychogeography and "the derive" (aimless drift), experience and exploration.[1]

Once locations have been chosen, each group begins to inhabit their site during class time. The activity will differ from group to group, some starting seeds, some preparing earth, some researching, some theorizing, some collecting, but the activity always being a particularly unique experience. During the Calvin College PLANT! project, some groups would meet for meals or coffee during sessions, some would make acquaintances with neighbors or passers-by, and one pair began walking lines, treading the earth in service of form. A requirement was made in terms of the acquisition of materials: aside from seeds, groups could only use materials found within a two-block radius of the site. This requirement enhances site specificity and encourages involvement with neighboring businesses, residences, and institutions. This requirement also introduces alternative economies, appropriate technologies, and place-based resource investigation. Groups' work develops as gardens are cultivated, sculptures are constructed, earth is moved, collections are maintained, irrigation systems are devised, and spaces are transformed into places. As the meetings continue, the groups begin to realize their own identity, an identity formed by community, and one formed by place-awareness and engagement.

The activity of each group is documented online by means of a group blog.[2] This form of documentation seems most appropriate as it can be updated in close to real time and can allow for photography, writing, video, drawing, and contextual positioning via hyperlink. The blog format also allows for a public viewership to be part of the conversation via comments. This is really important to the spirit of the project, as the conversation is so focused in the content of the piece. Blog technology is also quite accessible to students, so it can be expected of them as a means of documenting their participation and level of engagement. As an evaluation tool, the blog becomes equivalent to the created object, the record of process, decision making, query, and risk. The art, however, lies elsewhere, and this can be the subject of one of the many interesting discussions

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[1] Debord, Guy-Ernest, Theory of the Derive, *Internationale Situationiste* #2, 1958, Translation by Ken Knabb.

[2] http://plant.g-rad.org

surrounding this project. After a number of weeks of these work sessions, the project culminates with public viewing. The gardens are on display! The public viewing can happen in a number of different ways. Van tours, bike tours, walking tours, maps, pamphlets, and catalogues are all among the possibilities. A central information station is another possibility, and this can be imagined in a traditional gallery space, alternative space, commercial or institutional space, or a public space via mobile technology.

Relevant Theory/Research

In many ways, this project breaks from the traditional, quotidian format of art making, especially for the undergraduate studio art student, and this leads student participants and viewers to investigate contemporary art theory in search of answers. Course readings are crucial to grounding this project in the world of contemporary art practice. How can making a garden be making art? How can a garden be political? How does art relate to the institution that represents it? These questions can have a powerful impact on a liberal arts student, as a means of expanding the view, of cultivating insight. This project can be contextualized in a number of ways. Nicolas Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics* and Miwon Kwon's *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* are both excellent texts to support the execution of PLANT! Bourriaud's text identifies a current of art practice specifically interested in the dynamic between the artist and viewer and work that brings this consideration into its own making. Interactions and relationships, connectedness and difference, these are the foci of relational aesthetics, which comes as a counterpoint to the model of an isolated studio artist, with a propensity to confuse rather than to invite. Bourriaud's series of essays could be paired with Claire Bishop's *Participation*, providing a different perspective on relational art.

Miwon Kwon's *One Place After Another* contextualizes PLANT! in a different way, by exploring the history of site-specific art works, as they relate to the institution and the community. Further, Kwon's book calls the term "community" into question, and in dealing with audience in this way, it draws relationships to the topic of place and place identity. Kwon's text provides a means of talking about site and why the artist might have site concerns, and certainly why the artist might have institutional concerns as site becomes institution and becomes community. Including these readings in the syllabus makes for a base conversation to propel the work of PLANT!, but these are just two of many texts that deal with issues of art and place, identity, community, process, conceptuality, trope, science, or any number of current topics that generate the conversation. PLANT! draws from a number of currents in contemporary art, but what it does best is to succeed

as an academic project, across levels, across disciplines, and to succeed without any resolution; that the means eclipse the end is the project's best lesson. The dematerialization of the art object becomes an approachable and expansive topic. The PLANT! project operates incredibly well as a transforming experience or a shift in seeing and understanding. Based on student feedback, it is clear that this project challenged students to think of their relationship to place, to art, and to their liberal arts education in new and exciting ways. For some of these students, this was their first experience being active in the city as citizens and as artists, for some it was their first time using public transportation, or their first time thinking about native, local agriculture, or their first time seeing a connection between the issues of sculpture and issues of everyday life.

Pedagogical Suggestions to Foster Student Learning and Engagement

It is crucial to the success of PLANT! that the class professor participates in the project, as one of the group members. This encourages class participation in working together towards a common goal and allows for a greater community-discovery experience. Using the neighborhood as a selector makes the prospect of including the professor a bit more unbiased. It may also be helpful to introduce another group project earlier in the semester as a means of familiarizing the students with this type of collaboration. Even if it is one or two class sessions, this early project will help with the group dynamic during this longer project. The timeframe for the project could vary but works best with four to five weeks. Students are expected to spend approximately ten hours per week on site. It is important to meet frequently as a class, also, to plan for the final event and to coordinate public relations. Some of this activity can happen on the blog as well. It is also quite possible to connect the work of PLANT! to the interests of local community leaders. In a city dealing with displacement issues, this project might be a showcase for meaningful inhabitation. This project might also generate the interests of those working in city development arenas—public planning, architecture, etc.

PLANT! has the potential to truly engage the understanding of place and the liberal arts. It demonstrates the strong connection between visual arts and the liberal arts project, to engage a diverse and complex set of issues as a citizen directly and meaningfully inhabiting a place of particularity. PLANT! reveals art's potential to facilitate this type of engagement with creativity, vision, whimsy, curiosity, research, and hope.

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Listening to Community Voices: Documenting the Past and Present of a Neighborhood

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Introduction

The leading questions explored in the class can be formulated as follows: How can a media production project motivate dialogue between members of the same community belonging to different social strata? In what ways can a production be organized to generate more dialogue between the students and a particular community?

The process of answering these questions during CAS 222 proved relevant for the course content in several key aspects including interview techniques, location scouting, and editing. Generally the most efficient way of developing this project would have been to designate specific class members to fixed crew positions, but we soon realized that this model of organization would have limited the students' engagement with the dynamics of the community they were intended to embrace and learn about. Therefore, it was necessary to lower our quantitative expectations (e.g., number of interviews, minutes of footage) and qualitative expectations (e.g., aesthetic continuity) in order to allow the deepening of the relationships between the students and the South East Community Association.

Description of Project

CAS 222 (Calvin Media Company) is a project-oriented course that allows students to use their knowledge of video production in the development of audiovisual works for a variety of clients (off-campus groups). The idea is to give students a real-world or professional experience in the video-making business. During previous semesters, CAS 222 classes were intentionally oriented towards partnerships with community organizations such as The West Michigan Environmental Action Council and the Interurban Transit Partnership: The Rapid.

In the spring term of 2007, CAS 222 dedicated its class project to the audiovisual documentation of a group of residents living in the southeast side of Grand Rapids who were involved in the

South East Community Association (SECA). The class oversaw the production of a short documentary about the hopes and struggles of this Grand Rapids community. The course began with a meeting with Sarah Smith, a SECA representative, who shared the need the association had for capturing their voices in professional media. The class responded by documenting the testimony of residents concerning the history and development of the southeast community since its early years as the main African American working class area until its current status as one of the most deprived neighborhoods in our city.

We consider particularly relevant, the fact that SECA is located in an area with a demographic significantly different from the average Calvin College student. Students benefitted from the interaction with the residents. The work of videotaping the documented material also challenged the students' capacity to adapt and critically approach a social reality different from their own. This southeast neighborhood, according to the latest census, has one of the highest rates of violence, the lowest percentage of property ownership, and one of the highest rates of unemployment. It is paradoxical that important Grand Rapids personalities, such as former-president Gerald R. Ford, attended high school in this neighborhood. To embrace these social contradictions and to make a cohesive discourse that honors the residents' voices and experiences while facing the currently harsh social reality was a challenge that will help mature not only students' technical skills but their thinking as well. No well-rounded liberal arts education can be complete without this kind of immediate learning experience.

We agreed with SECA that students would interview half a dozen residents of the community chosen by the association, considering their particular knowledge and authority on the history and present circumstances of the neighborhood. The unedited interviews would be given to the association for their own possible future use. From this material, students would produce a short documentary summarizing their findings. The class was organized in a way that allows every student to interact with the residents before, during, and after the production. Each student was in charge of producing one interview requiring the arrangement of location settings and scheduling. Each student also interviewed his or her resident, which required closer research and interaction. In the technical aspects, the students rotated their crew positions (cinematography, sound, and lighting). We decided that all interviews needed to take place on location. The residents were interviewed in their homes, front yards, during a walk through their streets, at the local churches, and in the community association office.

Relevant Theory/Research

The most relevant theoretical foundation for this class is Bill Nichols's books *Introduction to Documentary* and *Representing Reality*. Before initiating production, the class discussed Nichols's concept of voice within the context of the documentation of a social reality foreign to the video maker. Since the idea for the project was started by the SECA community as a way to document audio visually the history of the neighborhood, we decided that the safest way to approach the task was to distance ourselves from the subjects documented. Concrete results of this decision were the elimination of a narrator or presenter for the documentary and the exclusive use of music composed and performed by SECA members in the editing of the project.

We assume that the main objective of the project was the actual documentation of members of the community—more than the production of a documentary. It was SECA who decided the list of interviewees, and it was the interviewees who proposed the location and content of each interview. This approach distanced the content of the class from most of the traditional works of documentary video making. Since we assumed the nonexistence of an agenda and script, the task of the students was solely to capture the testimony of the residents without assumptions or narrative inclinations. The dialogue then, between students and the community members deepened in the interaction during documentation more than in the analysis or crafting of a comprehensive video piece.

This apparent anticlimactic structure (the class did not conclude with a video containing social statements or comments) opened a new possibility in the understanding of pedagogical methods of both filmmaking and community engagement. In the aspects of filmmaking, students have developed a greater understanding of the importance of observation and non-intrusiveness. We trust that limiting the aspects in which the video makers would have creative control and opportunity to develop a voice would benefit the immediacy and, perhaps, accuracy of the process. These intentions and principles can be compared with the documentary modes of Cinema Verite and Direct Cinema (both of which Nichols refers to as observational); however, contrary to these cases the objective of this class was for service more than interpretation. Contrary to my expectations as professor, the lack of a final conclusive video piece and the concentration in service was particularly stimulating for the students. Without intending to resonate with Brazilian philosopher Paulo Freire, the class resulted in both social interaction and video-making practices paralleling some of the core dialogical principles of Freire's ideas presented in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed.*

Pedagogical Suggestions to Foster Student Learning and Engagement

For the South East Community, interacting and opening up to the students and their equipment was initially gratifying—most would not have the opportunity to document their own histories in a professional medium. However, this benefit seems to have been surpassed later in the project by the unexpected experience of interacting for an extended period of time with sincerely interested and motivated students. From the point of view of the class work, it is difficult to measure the output the project brought to the community beyond the documentation service; however, after the documentation concluded, several students commented that members of the community openly expressed their gratitude for what, in their experience, was the first time an outside group has demonstrated sustained and wide interest in their social circumstances without a set agenda or rationale.

This project has opened, in both our specific community and in our media production major, a new range of possibilities for service and interaction with off-campus groups and other organizations. This experience was also shared by a Calvin Honors English student who accompanied the crews in all the interview sessions. She wrote her honors thesis based on these interviews and her own conversations with SECA residents. This proves that the experience of CAS 222 has the potential to expand to other disciplines of study such as, journalism, English, and history.

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Liberal Arts and Place: Connecting Students and Neighborhood Master Planning

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Introduction

A recent development in urban planning in the United States has been a trend to move away from the traditional "zoning" types of development. That is, as cities have sought to revitalize themselves in order to make their downtowns and neighborhoods more attractive places to inhabit, they have sought to re-conceptualize what good planning should demand. For decades, within the United States, urban planners held to a dogma that shopping and retail, offices, industry, and residences should all be strictly zoned as separate entities. Such design patterns left urban areas in the United States highly isolated and segregated. Moreover, the distances between these entities almost universally demanded some kind of automobile transportation if an individual or family wanted to transport from one specialized zone to another. However, beginning in the late 1980s and continuing to the present, there has been a movement populated by planners, architects, and academics called The New Urbanism.[3] The New Urbanists, ironically enough, called for a return to pre-World War II planning in the United States. Under that rubric, they advocated mixed-use (a blend of residential, business, and retail), walkable (being able to ambulate on foot to stores, work, school, etc.) neighborhoods. In essence, New Urbanism operates as a reaction against normative growth patterns in US cities exemplified by suburban sprawl and restrictive residential enclaves. Beyond that, New Urbanism promotes a return to citizen participation in the planning process.

[3] Some seminal New Urbanist literature: Andres Duany, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, and Jeff Speck; *Suburban Nation: The Rise of Sprawl and the Decline of the American Dream.* 2000. New York: North Point Press; James Howard Kunstler, *The Geography of Nowhere: The Rise and Decline of America's Man-Made Landscape*. 1993. New York: Touchstone; and Peter Katz, *The New Urbanism: Toward an Architecture of Community.* 1994. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Closer to home, the planning commission of the city of Grand Rapids in 2002 adopted a new master plan that demonstrated a high level of New Urbanist influences.[4] In fact, under the new master plan for the city, the word "zoning" was removed in favor of "patterning"—in an effort to move away from rigidly codified planning that demanded exclusiveness and isolation for more integrated aspects of the city. A major component of the master plan also allowed for neighborhood organizations to take the lead in thinking about potential future development of their local community. More and more research indicates the importance of residents' empowerment in the neighborhood design process: "The past few decades have taught us that planning without community involvement is likely to lead to plans that sit on the shelf."[5] In essence, the Grand Rapids Master Plan incorporates this knowledge by offering neighborhood leaders and organizations a systematic protocol for future development (called area specific plans).

For our purposes, these neighborhood master-planning processes offer a wonderful entree for college students to think more explicitly about place and the liberal arts. As neighborhoods begin to consider how they might implement elements of the new master plan, college students could be used for a multitude of processes. In turn, the exposure to neighborhood leadership would allow students to learn more about the city, particular neighborhoods, history, planning theory, and what it might take to craft better places for citizens to inhabit.

Theory

Borrowing heavily from the school of New Urbanism, the 2002 City of Grand Rapids Master Plan finds basis in the following themes: great neighborhoods (the foundation of a great city), vital business districts, a strong economy, balanced transportation, a city that enriches our lives, a city in balance with nature, and partnerships. It should be noted that the master plan duly acknowledges *neighborhoods* first and foremost. The master plan document goes on to affirm that neighborhoods are "the physical and social expression of community. Every neighborhood can be a great neighborhood by building on its own assets and special character." The language of both New Urbanism and the City of Grand Rapids Master Plan echoes that of Lewis Mumford and

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[4] "City of Grand Rapids Master Plan, 2002." The entire document can be accessed at http://www.grand-rapids.mi.us/index.pl?page_id=632.

[5] Mary R. English, (1999) "A Guide for Smart Growth," *Forum for Applied Research and Public Policy*, 14(3), p. 36.

Jane Jacobs.[6] These two urbanists advocated neighborhoods as places where design encouraged neighborly interaction—where urban communities rested on a foundation of active street life. Moreover, the New Urbanists advocate for the return of true public spaces (parks, green spaces, squares, plazas, and playgrounds). That is, they are increasingly distressed by the privatization of urban spaces (shopping malls and commercial parks exemplify this type of development).

Since the seminal works of Jacobs and Mumford, other scholars have also asserted the relationship between physical characteristics and community-building. Recent research has demonstrated that residents living in walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods are more likely to know their neighbors, to participate politically, to trust others, and to be involved socially. In short, a neighborhood's physical dimension determines its "sense of community" because the public realm provides the overall framework within which the residents interact.[7] The City of Grand Rapids Master Plan is an implicit acknowledgement of the same sentiment: that good places can foster a strong social connectivity.

Process

In order to be integrated into the city master plan, Grand Rapids neighborhoods have to follow a protocol established within the 2002 document. Interested neighborhoods are able to develop area specific plans. In order for the process to be successful, neighborhood leaders must secure the involvement of as many stakeholders as possible. This demands recruitment and ability to articulate a vision of the neighborhood as a place that captures the imagination of the various stakeholders (including everyone from residents to business owners). A first step in the process is a visioning meeting where stakeholders gather to discuss the state of their neighborhood and their dreams for making it a better place. To facilitate this, stakeholders are guided through an assessment exercise called SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis. In short, the stakeholders are divided into groups where on large pieces of butcher paper they make lists of the strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threats regarding their neighborhood. Next, they participate in an activity called dot-voting. Each individual is given three dot stickers

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[6] Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. 1961. New York: Vintage Books; and Lewis Mumford, *The City in History: Its Origins, Its Transformations, and Its Prospects*. 1961. New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World.

[7] See especially Emily Talen, (2000) "Measuring the Public Realm: A Preliminary Assessment of the Link Between Public Space and Sense of Community," *Journal of Architecture and Planning Research,* 14(4), pp. 344-360.

for each of the four SWOT categories. In practice, it means that every stakeholder gets three votes to choose how to use. For instance, a person could use three of his or her votes on one issue, spread the votes evenly across three issues, or use two dots on one issue and one on another. Through this process, stakeholders both vocalize and learn about their neighborhood. It is a key step to better understanding the community and what design implements might make the community a better place.

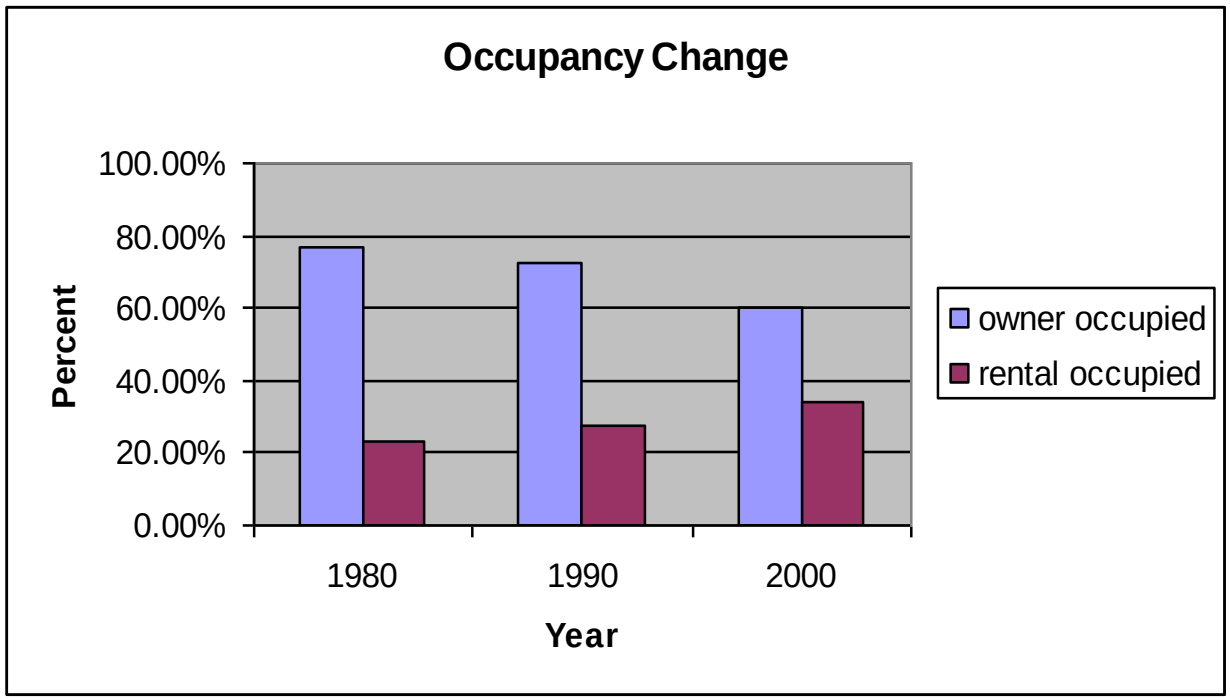
Another step in the process is to again gather stakeholders to jointly work through city-provided workbooks where they gain even more knowledge about their neighborhood. The workbook offers different rubrics for describing different neighborhoods. Stakeholders are given the opportunity to work through the process in dialogue with each other so that they come to a consensus within the workbooks. For instance, the master plan makes crucial distinctions between turn-of-the-century neighborhoods, early twentieth century neighborhoods, post-war neighborhoods, and late twentieth century neighborhoods. Properly identifying neighborhoods is significant in that the new master plan places a premium on protecting the city's assets by assuring that any new developments in a neighborhood fit the surrounding built-context. In other words, by processing these workbooks, stakeholders begin to better understand positive design elements that give their neighborhood its unique character.

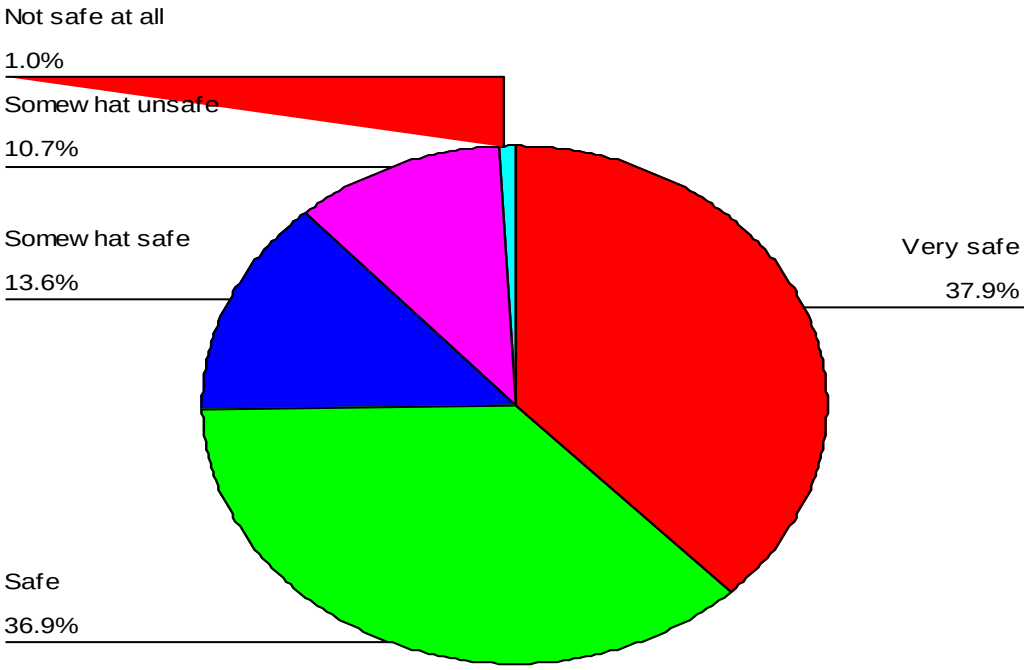
Next, stakeholders conduct a walk through the neighborhood where they assess the assets of the surroundings and how they might best expand those strengths. At the same time, they might also encounter some highly problematic design flaws that might be addressed during redevelopment planning.

Following the walk, the neighborhood stakeholders will engage in a charrette—a period of intense design activity. These sessions will include planners, architects, and stakeholders. It is here that concrete plans will be drawn for the future development of the neighborhood. Following the charrette will be a "feedback loop" where stakeholders can comment on the design as it stands. The feedback loop can include design meetings and more rounds of charrettes. When a satisfactory design is secured, an area specific plan is forwarded to the city planning office. If all goes well, the plan will be approved by the planning commission and adopted as part of the Grand Rapids Master Plan.

Student Involvement

The neighborhood master-planning process offers many opportunities for student involvement. Complementarily, liberal arts students would have much to offer the design process. Urban sociology students at Calvin College have been intimately involved as a local neighborhood association Fuller Area Neighbors (FAN) sought to redesign their neighborhood. A crucial component of area specific plans is the ability to demonstrate a good familiarity and understanding of the neighborhood context. The sociology students provided invaluable assistance as neighborhood researchers. They conducted open interviews, analyzed census tract data, implemented GIS software results, and administered surveys. As an example of their work, students produced the following bar graph and pie chart concerning the Fuller Area.


Occupancy Change
100.00%
80.00%
60.00%
40.00%
20.00%
0.00%
Percent
1980
1990
2000
Year
owner occupied
rental occupied


Not safe at all
1.0%
Somew hat unsafe
10.7%
Somew hat safe
13.6%
Very safe
37.9%
Safe
36.9%

The type of research the sociology students provided for the board of FAN proved to be very enlightening and useful. The research allowed leaders to better understand the nature of their neighborhood and what residents desired.

Beyond that, for area specific plans to be implemented, there has to be serious consideration of the economic implications for the neighborhood. With that in mind, the same semester that the sociology students were working with FAN, a Calvin College student majoring in economics conducted a study to assess how the area specific plan might affect the businesses in the neighborhood—both potential benefits and potential downsides. A vital component of New Urbanism is the idea that neighborhoods should be mixed-use places where residents could walk to businesses. With that in mind, the student administered a survey. A couple of questions from the survey are excerpted below.

On a scale of 1 to 5, how much shopping do you do at the businesses in the neighborhood?

Please rate the following factors on a scale of 1 to 5 according to their importance in your decision of where to shop (1 = Very important to my decision of where to shop, 5 = Not important to my decision at all).

_____ Price

_____ Service

_____ Friendship with owners/workers

_____ Integrity/honesty of company

_____ Location

_____ Service activity of company in neighborhood

The students' research results indicated that very few neighborhood residents shopped locally. It proved to be a good opportunity to impress upon business owners how New Urbanist design might be in their best economic interest. The work conducted by these students over the course of the semester provided the residents and businesses of FAN a much richer understanding of their neighborhood and, subsequently, a better sense of how they might move forward with a redesign process.

In addition to the work previously accomplished by sociology and economic students, there remain numerous opportunities for other students to be involved in area specific plans. The following is in no way exhaustive.

Architecture students: An important part of the neighborhood redesign process is envisioning the possibilities. Architecture students could offer renderings of possible redesigns of the neighborhood during the charrettes. Their drawings could be a crucial component of the area specific plan.

Social work students: The visioning meetings with the SWOT analysis and dot voting would be practical opportunities to understand nonprofit organizations and the processes involved. These students could be intimately involved in helping to organize, plan, and facilitate these meetings.

History students: A major component of neighborhood redesign is authenticity. That is, a frequently articulated goal within the City of Grand Rapids Master Plan is the value of context and compatibility. The master plan states: "The protection of historically and architecturally significant buildings is also an important part of maintaining visual character and a sense of continuity with the city's heritage" (p. 17). History students could be utilized to research the history of the neighborhood and present findings to stakeholders.

Discussion

Involving students in an area specific plan has the potential to be a venue where engaging place has significant impact on the students' liberal arts education. Beyond that, it would also afford the opportunity for students to influence significantly the future design and development of a specific place. The process would have to include considerable discussion of a number of theories—including recent work on issues such as social capital. In addition, it might also present opportunity to discuss the limits[8] of design when it comes to creating "good places." Furthermore, the area specific plan process would give students exposure to city employees, neighborhood leaders, members of the nonprofit sector, and business owners. Most importantly, this milieu would be a vibrant learning environment wherein students could see both the limits and potential when theory intersects with practice. It would be an opportunity to consider creatively the concept of place and how it might inform liberal arts education. In the end, involving students in neighborhood master plans is replicable. In Grand Rapids alone there are over thirty identified

[8] I'm thinking specifically here of the criticism that New Urbanists are committed to a "physicalist fallacy."

neighborhood associations or organizations.[9] Institutions such as Grand Valley State University, Aquinas College, and Cornerstone University are all located in areas where any number of neighborhoods eligible to submit an area specific plan would be accessible to students.

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[9] This is according to the Community Research Institute at Grand Valley State University. More information can be found at http://cridata.org/.

Developing World Citizens: Learning to Listen to the Voices of the Poor

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Description of the project

For the last ten years my wife, Jo Ann Van Engen, and I have led a semester program in Honduras. The program is designed to expose undergraduate students to key issues that contribute to poverty, to discuss how those might be addressed both in Honduras and around the world and to analyze what our role should be in responding to those problems.

Students spend considerable time during the semester learning about and evaluating major development theories—those theories that attempt to explain why poverty exists and how best to combat it. Students study the theories of modernization, dependency, neoliberalism, human rights and geography, among others, and are asked to reflect on which makes the most sense in understanding what they see in Honduras.

Students also read selections from authors we refer to collectively as democratization theorists—David Korten, John Clark, and others who posit that true development can best occur by working at the local level, strengthening local communities rather than focusing exclusively on global, macro-level growth. Wendell Berry, well-known essayist, poet, and farmer, in his essay *Damage* writes of how he harmed a piece of land in his earnest attempt to improve it.

> The trouble was the familiar one: too much power, too little knowledge. The fault was mine. I was careful to get expert advice. But this only exemplifies what I already knew. No expert knows everything about every place, not even everything about any place. If one's knowledge of one's whereabouts is insufficient, if one's judgment is unsound, then expert advice is of little use (Berry, 1990:5).

It would be logical to assume that simply locating our program in Honduras, one of the poorest countries in the western hemisphere, would ensure that this attention to local knowledge, to place-based learning, would naturally happen. And to be fair, we worked hard to ensure students heard from many local voices. We brought in guest speakers twice a week, took trips every other

weekend, visited community projects, and learned about the work of an array of organizations working for the poor. Our students responded enthusiastically and thoughtfully to the issues we brought to the table. But, increasingly, we felt that the four walls of our classroom were insulating students from truly understanding the issues we discussed and their impact on people. And in exposing them to so many communities, projects, and organizations in so many places, we succeeded often in giving them project overload, but didn't help them grasp the myriad ways that complex communities and poverty interact.

So, this past fall we redesigned the entire semester to try to incorporate more of the facets of true place-based learning in an attempt to give our students exposure to real people trying their best to work through the complex issues we discuss in the classroom.

There were three main place-based components in the semester.

1. Nueva Suyapa—an urban community on the outskirts of Tegucigalpa, the capital of Honduras.
2. Guanabano—a tiny, rural community in eastern Honduras.
3. Cofradía—a large urban community outside San Pedro Sula, the commercial center of Honduras.

NUEVA SUYAPA

Nueva Suyapa is the marginal neighborhood where we and our two children live, located about fifteen minutes from the university where we run our program. We had always included visits to the neighborhood as part of the students' learning experience, but the visits were short and intended primarily to expose students to the poverty that characterizes life for the vast majority of Hondurans.

Last semester, we decided to try place-based learning in Nueva Suyapa. We held class regularly in the neighborhood and invited numerous community leaders to talk to the class, walk with them through the community, and tell them about their lives and work. We paired Calvin students with youth from the community to spend time together twice a week. At the end of the semester, students chose topics they were interested in and together with their youth partners carried out research in the community. Students researched the effects of micro-credit on women's self-esteem, housing improvements, attitudes of youth about their lives and future, and a comparison of health between the people of Nueva Suyapa and that of the residents of the middle-class neighborhood in which they lived. As a result, by the end of the semester the students saw the

residents of Nueva Suyapa as real people (and in many cases as friends)—with problems and challenges but also with resources and strengths.

Place-Based Learning in Nueva Suyapa

Here are a few of the ways students spent their time:

- Sitting on the floor of the principal's office at the local school as he frankly discussed the school's role in the community.
- Squeezed into a small room, talking to the local community board about the struggles of staying committed to their vision in the face of so many difficulties.
- Touring the local health clinic and talking with nurses about how difficult it is to treat patients who can't afford the medicines they are prescribed.
- Spending the weekend with families helping out with housework, going to church, making tortillas, bathing with a bucket.
- Walking through the community with their youth partners as they gathered research for their projects—interviewing door-to-door, holding focus groups, or noting architectural differences in housing.

GUANABANO

Guanabano is a small community of about forty families in rural Honduras. It has no running water, no electricity, and all of Guanabano's inhabitants are farmers. In the past, we would send students to a rural village for a week in order to expose them to rural life, but although students enjoyed the experience, they usually said that they had only just started to get comfortable with their surroundings by the end of their stay. This semester we planned four stays in Guanabano, each of increasing length and spread out over the semester. Students stayed in pairs with the same family each visit, and during the last stay, the students carried out a research project in the community. Students were enthusiastic about the experience and felt that the amount of time they spent in the community allowed them to get a much better feel for the rhythms of rural life. By spending three or four weekends in a community, students began to fall into the pattern of rural life. They shared a bed with someone else or slept on mats on the floor just as their family did. They bathed outside with a small amount of water (or not at all, if they were too shy); they found that not all the families were the same—some were outgoing and confident, other families were shy and found it difficult to interact. Students were able to correct their romanticized view of campesinos and rural life and get a more accurate picture of its reality.

COFRADÍA

The biggest change we made was to move the whole program for three weeks to Cofradía, a poor community outside of San Pedro Sula. Our students moved in with local families, and we spent most of our time out in the neighborhood talking with local leaders, priests, pastors, business people, government officials, and ordinary people in the community. For every issue we raised, students were able to see its real-life application and implications in the lives of the families we met.

In Cofradía, we introduced students to issues like land tenure, religion, maquilas, banana industry, gangs, role of church, and immigration. We deliberately chose issues relevant to the community: **land tenure**, because the community had been trying to gain titles to their land for over twenty years and were in the process of achieving that goal due to a new government initiative and the continual advocacy of a local NGO. **Maquilas and immigration,** since about 20% of the families have someone working in the maquilas or illegally migrated to the United States. **Role of the church,** because across poor communities in Central America, the Catholic church is losing members to the myriad of evangelical churches, and the uneasy dynamic that has created is only just beginning to be addressed.

Place-Based Learning: Understanding the Complex Role of Maquilas

In Cofradía, many of our students lived with or next to someone working in the maquilas (garment factories or sweatshops). They had also all heard, before coming to Honduras, horror stories about the inhumane conditions in sweatshops around the world. So, they were eager to see for themselves.

We spent one morning touring a maquila and talking with managers about how many jobs they were providing and the generous benefits they gave to their workers.

That afternoon we visited with union representatives whose attempts to organize at the maquilas were constantly thwarted by managers who fired any employee they suspected of union sympathies. The representatives pointedly asked students what we were going to do.

The next morning students listened to three residents of Cofradía who used to work in maquilas and had been mistreated.

That afternoon students met with two more current maquila workers who said that without their maquila jobs they would not be able to own their homes. The women said they were treated well, but one admitted she had had to send her children to live with their grandmother since she could not work and take care of them.

For example, when we discussed the increase of immigration by Hondurans to the United States, many students went home and talked to their Honduran brothers or fathers about what it was like to make the trip and why they had returned. We visited the banana plantations, met with both Catholic and Protestant leaders and learned about issues of land tenancy from the families

themselves who were excited about receiving titles, finally, for land they had lived on for decades.

Pedagogical Suggestions to Foster Student Learning and Engagement

The learning that took place in Cofradía, Guanabano, and Nueva Suyapa was much more engaged and lively than learning in the classroom. Students were able to make instant connections regarding the import of what they were seeing and its impact on the people they were beginning to know. This resulted in students wanting to dive deeper into issues than what previous students had. Students also were more interested in talking about their own role as First World citizens in the search for solutions to these problems.

We tried to foster a sense of engagement by carving out times for discussion in the evenings or upon the students' return from community experiences. This allowed for opportunities to process what they were seeing and to learn from each other.

The research projects served to solidify students' learning in a number of different settings. We asked each student to pick one of the topics we studied in Cofradía to research more in-depth along with others who shared their interest. We repeated that process in Nueva Suyapa. Students wrote up their findings regarding both the content surrounding each issue and their own personal response to it, in a final paper as well as in oral presentations for the whole group.

Involving community leaders in the process was gratifyingly successful. All the leaders we contacted

Pros and Cons to Place-Based Learning

Challenges

- Students see fewer examples of projects, fewer communities, less variety overall.
- The professor must be open to less structure—discussions with local community leaders don't come in organized outlines or PowerPoint, and sometimes community leaders come across without hope or frustrated.
- The class can never be quite sure what it will get—e.g., Cofradía has little gang activity, although it is a huge problem in the area.
- It can be difficult to find the balance between going deep on a particular issue and getting repetitive. Students may get bored with a topic if they feel they've heard too much about it.
- It takes time—for student and professor. This type of learning, doesn't fit nicely into three hours/week—repeated visits, weekends with families, conflicts with jobs.

Strengths

- Students get depth and complexity, not issues put into neat packages. Place-based learning puts people and issues together—students hear and see real lives, not just hear lectures.
- Students understand the inter-relatedness of so many issues—how a single mom working in a maquila is connected to teens joining gangs, for example.
- Students get unexpected lessons and opportunities—our look at education in the neighborhood was the impetus for students organizing to help finish the roof on a school that was meeting in deplorable conditions.
- Students get an understanding that learning can always be like this—taking advantage of opportunities for learning and understanding that can last a lifetime.

were pleased to be included in our learning, and many of them spent hours trying to show our students the reality of their world. They were open and patient with our students as they questioned and learned.

We contracted a local person, familiar with the community, to set up visits prior to our arrival and to set up the housing for our students. Local families were overprotective but extremely welcoming and open with students.

Transferability/Suggestions for Potential Course Placement of a Case Study

Obviously, we can't all move our classes to Third World countries in order to expose students to these realities, but we can look at ways to dig deeper into a particular issue within its context in the United States. These are a few of the lessons we have learned and think are applicable to teaching in any context.

1. Choose issues which resonate in the local community. For example:
    - Funding of public schools.
    - Gerontology and nursing homes.
    - Globalization.
2. Try to get students to hear, see, and experience the different sides of the local issue. For example:
    - Funding of public schools—spend time in poorest and wealthiest school in region, spend time with parents, students, teachers; talk about how the schools are funded.
    - Gerontology and treatment in nursing homes—spend significant time in the nursing home—with residents, families, employees.
    - Globalization and loss of automotive jobs—spend time with unemployed workers and managers, set up videoconferencing with newly employed Mexican workers.
3. Help students work through the complexity of issues, so they can decide on their position and take action. For example, is the current approach to funding public schools, or treating the elderly or globalizing the auto industry healthy or not? Students can then be helped to work through what we all (students, professors, and society) can do to address those issues.

Example of Issue Using Place-Based Learning: Immigration Policy
Instead of discussing the issue in class and looking at the pros and cons of immigration and immigration policies and inviting one special speaker into the class, do some of the following:

- Match up students with immigrant families. Have students visit the family in their home, go to work with them for a day and see how the worker is treated, spend a weekend with the family and go to church together.
- Have students meet with workers who feel their jobs are threatened by illegal immigrants and get the worker's perspective.
- Encourage students to take action based on what they've learned—letter to the editor, meet with their congressperson.

A course similar to our Semester in Honduras program could be carried out across many disciplines—social work, sociology, international development. The key is to identify, with the students, the issues they want to address and then to move into a neighborhood where students can observe these issues playing out in real life.

Most of our students will not end up living in a Third World country. But all of them will be citizens of their own communities, and this experience will serve to make them more thoughtful citizens, aware of the effect their choices have on the rest of the world.

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Liberal Arts and Place: Using Walking and Biking Tours to Connect Students to Place

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Introduction

> The core curriculum at Calvin College is a preparation for life…the core equips students for a life of informed and effective Christian service in contemporary society at large, for an engagement with God's world . . . the goal of the core curriculum at Calvin College is likewise divided into three parts: knowledge, skills, and virtues. The courses in the core are designed to impact a basic knowledge of God, the world, and ourselves; to develop the basic skills in oral, written, and visual communication, cultural discernment, and physical activity; and to cultivate such disposition as patience, diligence, honesty, charity, and hope that make for a life well lived (Calvin Catalog, 2006/2007, pg 35).

What is unique to this description of the Calvin curriculum is the emphasis placed on developing virtues, through which we feel and act in certain ways. One of the ways to develop and practice virtues is living in community, for this requires a conscious effort on the part of the individual to actively work for the well-being of the larger society in which we are placed. As Richard Mouw (2001) has noted, our actions should manifest those subjective attitudes and dispositions—those virtues that will motivate us in our efforts to promote societal health.

Throughout history, Americans have demonstrated the ability to balance personal freedom with promoting the common good. For example, much has been written about Thomas Jefferson's words "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" which reflect this balance. In the making of the film *Thomas Jefferson*, filmmaker Ken Burns interviewed historians and philosophers, asking them to explain what Jefferson meant by the words "pursuit of happiness." What Burns found was a profound sense that Jefferson connected both individual and societal happiness. Writer Timothy Ferris portrays this connection between individual and society when he states, "it seems to me that the purpose of education is to answer the question of what the pursuit of happiness is for you. The reason we go to school ought to be not to learn some skills to get a job to make a better salary, but to find out enough of who I am so that I know how to pursue my own happiness. And that happiness is necessarily involved with that of the wider society for reasons that Jefferson saw so clearly. If you just pursue your own happiness and you don't care about anyone

else, it doesn't work. You find out that your happiness is bound up with everyone else's happiness. It's a common endeavor . . . so many of Jefferson's ideas converge on the realization that, if it doesn't work out for everyone, it's not going to work out for the individual." Philosopher Stephen Mitchell highlights the duty of seeking the common good even more strongly when he notes, "as he [Jefferson] meant it, I think it had nothing to do with hedonistic pleasure. It had to do with deep satisfaction—including the satisfactions of doing your duty to your country, of doing the right thing by your friends and by your enemies."

As these quotes indicate, there has been a long history of civic responsibility in the United States, where individuals have struggled to balance their individual wishes (freedom) with the responsibility they felt to contribute to the *common good* of society. Over the last half of the twentieth century, many feel this sense of civic responsibility has lessened, and Americans have lost the desire to collectively strive for the common good as evident in the writing of Robert Putnam (2000) who describes the loss of social capital in America over the last twenty-five years.

Yet new emphasis has been placed on finding ways to help people reconnect across the United States. These efforts can also be seen at Calvin, where efforts have been taken to help students build community within the college as well as help reconnect students to the surrounding communities around Calvin. The challenge for many professors is helping students see how studying such subjects as history, philosophy, music, and art can contribute to how they should live their lives on a day-to-day basis both now and in the future. This case study describes several such efforts by Calvin to connect a wide range of classes to the study of urban sprawl.

Theory

John Muir, the great American naturalist, once stated, "When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe" (Sierra Club Staff, 1992, p. 73), and so it is with current development patterns. As the twenty-first century unfolds, our sprawling development pattern in the United States has emerged as a major issue for our collective society. The challenge of urban sprawl is multi-dimensional and encompasses a wide range of issues including:

> **Loss of the Public Realm.** The decay or lack of attention to the public realm can be seen in a variety of ways, from the loss of the front porch in neighborhoods to a lack of permanence in municipal buildings and public space. Prior to the 1940s most houses had a front porch where people gathered and socialized with their neighbors. However, as air

conditioning was created, television evolved, and backyards became more attractive, we have seen a movement from the front porch to the backyard and from public to private space (Dolan, 2002).

Declining Tax Base (Deteriorating Cities). Many central cities have experienced decline as the suburbs have grown rapidly. As people and wealth leave the city, property values decline, tax rates increase, services decline, and social problems and crime often increase. This creates a downward spiral for urban areas and provides the model of throwaway communities. As central cities decline, can first-ring suburbs be far behind? In a study of the Minneapolis/St. Paul area, M. Orfield (1997) creates a time-lapsed montage of communities bobbing up and down in successive waves of prosperity, decline, and decay. These waves, moving out from the city are now lapping into the suburbs. Orfield is quick to point out that "if it can happen here, no American region is immune" and prompts the question: Where will it end? As tax bases erode in inner cities, fast-growing suburbs struggle to keep pace with development. Consider that the infrastructure (sewer, water, streets, parks, fire, police, etc.) to support this development becomes more and more expensive the further out it stretches. For example, "in South Carolina, if sprawl continues unchecked, statewide infrastructure costs for the period 1995 to 2015 are projected to be more than $56 billion, or $750 per citizen every year for the next twenty years" (Edelman, Roe, & Patton, 1999, p. 6).

Automobile Dependency. As development sprawls the amount of time people spend getting from one place to another increases. In the United States, where mass transit is underdeveloped, a large portion of the day is spent in transit. The amount of time Americans spend driving automobiles has increased 60 percent since 1980 (Hinds, 1999). In addition, new developments are planned with automobiles in mind, meaning bigger parking lots, larger roads, more air pollution, and the erosion of pedestrian environments. Robert Putnam (2000) notes that each additional ten minutes spent in daily commuting time cuts involvement in the community by 10 percent. A report from the Surface Transportation Policy Project (STPP, 2003) shows that America's families spend more than nineteen cents out of every dollar on transportation—an expense second only to housing and greater than food and health care combined. The nation's poorest families are particularly burdened, spending more than 40 percent of their take-home pay just to get around (STPP, 2003).

Health Related Risks. Sedentary living habits have increased in the last twenty years with the increase in desk jobs and the lack of exercise in peoples' day-to-day lives. The increasing use of automobiles has decreased physical activity. Sedentary living contributes to poor health and the rising level of obesity in the United States. It is estimated that physical inactivity and obesity are contributing factors in 300,000 to 500,000 deaths each year in the United States. There has been an increase in the prevalence of obesity among adults in the United States over the last twenty years, adding over $100 billion per year to our national health care costs. Nationwide, the proportion of children ages six to eighteen that were overweight increased from 6 percent in 1976-1980, to 15 percent in 1999-2000. Alarmingly, one in every seven kids is overweight in the United States (Jackson & Kochtitzky, 2001). Design of cities and neighborhoods can encourage people to walk often and for relatively longer periods. For example, residents of urban areas living in houses that were built prior to 1974 are more likely to get exercise walking than peers living in newer homes. A recent study published in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* found that the link between walking and house age was present in urban and suburban areas but not in rural areas. The study found that what makes older neighborhoods special is that homes are built close together making walking easy and time efficient. Older neighborhoods mix homes with businesses and parks, which encourages walking over driving. Sidewalks and the safety of streets are greater so we can walk more. Newer neighborhoods usually have wider streets than do older neighborhoods, and wider streets encourage higher speeds for auto traffic (*Parks & Recreation*, 2002). According to public health professionals one of the most effective interventions is regular, physical activity such as bicycling and walking as well as leading an active life.

Environmental Problems. As sprawl increases our reliance on the automobile often works to undermine general health, it also contributes to poor water and air quality. A sprawling development pattern often undermines the benefits provided by a healthy ecosystem. Ecosystem benefits include water and air purification, mitigation of floods and droughts, detoxification and decomposition of waste, soil generation and fertility, and climate stabilization, among others, and these benefits are typically undervalued in the marketplace. Urban development typically negates these services with the loss of wetlands and the creation of impervious surfaces. Watershed planning that is coordinated

with recreation planning can reduce non-point source pollution, contribute to aquifer recharge, mitigate floods and droughts, and provide for habitat diversity. The park system within a community should be considered a part of the community infrastructure and an investment in the community's natural capital. A well-planned park system is coordinated with municipal water management, transportation planning, and energy conservation. A well-planned park and recreation system provides diverse benefits and can reduce infrastructure costs.

Loss of Social Capital. The idea of social capital has received a great deal of attention since the release of Robert Putnam's book *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. In this book, Putnam reviews the "state of community" and concludes that America is suffering from a decline in social capital. Putnam defines social capital as "features of social life—networks, norms, and trust—that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives." This is a critical element to the success of democracy. Putnam (2000) attributes our loss of social capital to a variety of factors such as changing work patterns, urban sprawl, generational change, television, and other changes in technology. Regardless of the cause, the issue of social capital is an important issue for leisure-service professionals as one of the benefits of our programs and services is building social capital within communities. Consider, in a study of conflict and violence in and around public housing in Chicago, researchers found that the residents of buildings with surrounding green space had a stronger sense of community, had better relationships with their neighbors, and reported using less violent ways of dealing with domestic conflicts, particularly with their parents (Sullivan & Kuo, 1996).

In dealing with these and other issues associated with sprawl, Kuntsler (1996) has called for developing a more widespread consensus of hope—a cultural agreement as to the kind of world we want to live in as well as the will to make this vision a reality. Developing a consensus of hope requires the ability to see the big picture, to move beyond specific disciplines to seeing the issue as a whole. In this regard a liberal arts education provides a solid framework to understanding that development should encompass a wide range of economic, social, environmental, and spiritual components, which demand an interdisciplinary approach to urban issues. As Richard Florida (2002) asks, "What do we really want? What kind of life and what kind of society do we want to bequeath to coming generations? This is not something we can

leave to the vagaries of chance, to the decisions of political leaders or even to the most forward looking public policy . . . To purposely address it we must harness all of our intelligence, our energy, and most important our awareness. The task of building a truly creative society is not a game of solitaire. This game, we play as a team" (p. 326).

Process or Innovation

In response to the challenge of connecting students to the city of Grand Rapids as well as getting them to think critically about the issue of sprawl, Calvin has initiated biking and walking tours of the community. These tours have introduced students to specific neighborhoods as well as Grand Rapids as a whole. Descriptions of these tours follow.

Urban bike tours are twenty- to thirty-mile bike trips throughout the metropolitan Grand Rapids area. Tours include over twenty stops of historical or contemporary significance to the city. At each stop, students are engaged in thinking critically about urban issues (e.g., sprawl, declining tax base in cities, open-space issues, greenways, etc), quality-of-life issues, and what kind of communities they want to live in (the characteristics of a good community). A wide range of materials has been created (over eighty pages), which includes resources for each of the stops, complete with directions to the next stop, maps, old pictures, statistics, stories, and neighborhood histories. Check the website for an outline of potential discussion topics at various stops.

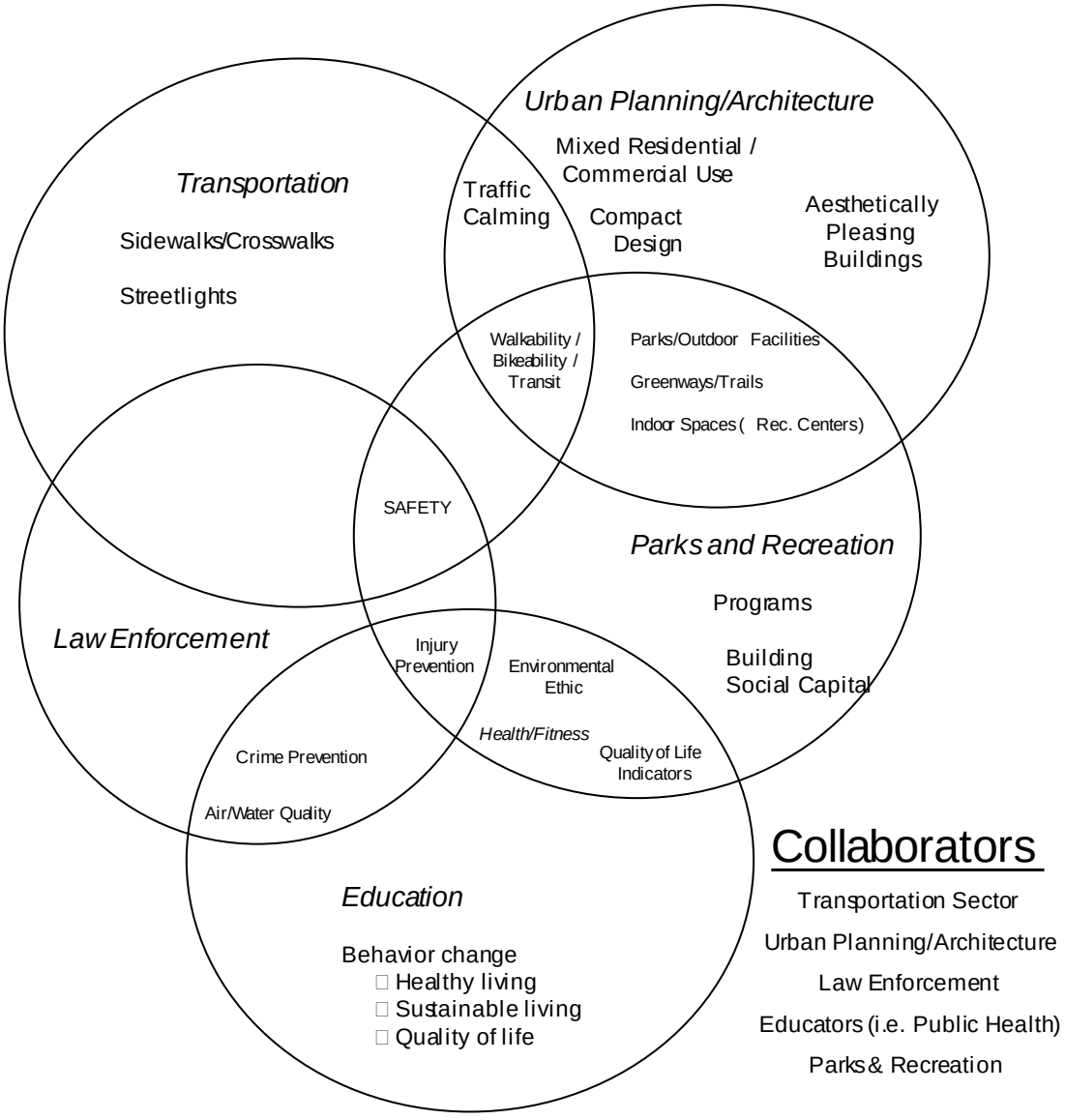
Walking tours have been created for a variety of neighborhoods in Grand Rapids. These tours present the history of the neighborhood as well as its current assets and challenges. Students are often encouraged to connect with people in the neighborhood to discuss the area and what it offers residents. Four neighborhood walking tours have been written up as docent sheets to offer resources for the leader of the tour. These docent sheets can include maps, suggested itineraries, photos, and other resources to help students understand the neighborhood. Check the website for examples of these neighborhood walking tours.

Characteristics and Key Features of Both the Walking and Biking Tours

Experiential. These tours actively engage students as they walk or bicycle through the city, seeing firsthand the challenges and beauty of the city of Grand Rapids. Students are challenged to think critically about what makes a good neighborhood and what contributes to the quality of life of individuals living throughout a large metropolitan area. Students are also encouraged to share their experiences of working and living in the city.

Interdisciplinary. The tours also help students to see the complexities of dealing with issues such as urban sprawl and the need of a variety of perspectives in ultimately providing solutions to many of the issues we face today. As the following diagram illustrates there are great opportunities for collaboration if people are aware and willing to engage with professionals from a wide variety of disciplines.

Improved Quality of Life – Intersections Among Collaborators and Activities



Adapted from: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2000

Addresses current issues. These tours address a wide range of current urban issues such as green space within urban areas, walkability and/or bikeability of communities, urban design, and sports facilities development in downtown areas. Students are encouraged to reflect on these issues prior to and after completing each tour.

Can be adapted and replicated. These tours can be (and have been) adapted to meet a variety of educational objectives. For example, the bike tour has been adapted in physical education and recreation to help students examine the role of parks, open space, and urban design play in addressing community issues such as fitness and environmental issues. A resource book has been developed to assist with this process, providing a good foundation on which to build and adapt the tour as needed. From our experience, we feel the concepts of walking and biking tours can be replicated in other communities as well. Other examples of how the concepts of walking and biking tours have been used include the following:

> The urban bike tour was first created in the summer of 2005 as a means to offer students in Recreation 201 a means to connect the disciplines of health, physical education, and recreation to quality-of-life issues. Since this time the bike tour has been offered multiple times as a part of this class.
>
> In the fall of 2005, the tour was adapted and shortened to be a part of Streetfest, the college's first-year student orientation program. Streetfest sets up partners of first-year Calvin students and their faculty and staff mentors with over fifty community agencies, organizations, and churches in several Grand Rapids neighborhoods. Three days of practical chores initiate students into the importance of service-learning throughout their college careers as well as strengthening ongoing partnerships with organizations throughout the Grand Rapids community. During Streetfest, the tour was shortened to approximately twenty miles and was used to introduce students to the city of Grand Rapids and the many service-learning opportunities that exist for students to be involved in, in the community. Over sixty students participated in three distinct tours lead by six different faculty members. These tours were repeated in the fall of 2006 and are again scheduled for the fall of 2007. Check the website for a link to a newspaper article on these activities.
>
> Walking tours of various Grand Rapids neighborhoods have also been incorporated into Streetfest in a number of ways (since the fall of 2006). Currently most service projects

include a short walking tour of the neighborhood in which the students will be working. In addition, full tours have been offered where more time is taken and further distance is covered to examine a specific neighborhood.

Numerous walking tours have been offered as a part of Prelude, a first-year orientation class for students, as a means to help students familiarize themselves with the city as well as gain an appreciation for the history and current developments going on in the city.

In the fall of 2006, the bike tour was used as a part of orientation for Project Neighborhood. Project Neighborhood is an alternative housing opportunity for Calvin students to live in intentional Christian community in the city of Grand Rapids. Participants are committed to personal spiritual growth, structured time together as house residents, and service to the neighborhood and community.

In the spring of 2007, several walking and biking tours were offered in conjunction with the first annual *Embrace Our Place Festival*. These tours explored a number of different areas and neighborhoods within the city.

In the spring of 2007, a bike tour was offered for seminary students interested in urban ministries at the Calvin Seminary.

Student response to both the walking and biking tours has been good. Papers received from students in connection to the bike tour have been of good quality and indicate that students have been engaged in the process. For example, one student sent the following email (unsolicited) in response to the bike tour.

> Two things; First of all I just wanted to thank you for taking our class on the bike tour today. While I can't speak for everyone, personally I really enjoyed everything that we saw today. I had no idea that there was so much going on around Grand Rapids. Secondly I was really interested in all the community development going on around the city . . . so congrats on having a fairly substantial impact on at least one student. Thanks again for a great day.
>
> (Student in Recreation 201 Class)

Students who have been involved in the Streetfest tours have noted that they have been a bit overwhelmed by the amount of information but that overall they felt it gave them an excellent overview of the city.

Future possibilities of incorporating biking and walking tours into classes include:

Environmental studies students (ENST 302: Environment and Society: Issues and Policies). Walking tours could be used here to examine environmental issues in neighborhoods as well as to see how humans have impacted the environment throughout history.

Exercise science students (PE 201: Historical and Sociological Foundations of Physical Education, Recreation, and Sport). Tours could be used as a continuation of the current bike tour, examining how urban design impacts lifelong fitness levels.

Geography students (GEOG 351: Introduction to Urban and Regional Planning). Biking and walking tours could be used here to introduce students to the history of the city and how it has developed over time as well as the current planning principles being used.

History students. History students could be encouraged to develop walking tours in various neighborhoods of the city. Such projects would require historical research as well as offer students the opportunity to share their knowledge with others.

Nursing students. (Nursing 379 Practicum: Community Focused Nursing and Leadership/Management). Nursing students doing practicums throughout the city could use walking tours as an introduction to the community in which they will be working.

Pre-architecture students. Walking tours have longed served as an excellent way for architecture students to learn more about good urban design.

Sociology students (SOC 302: Urban Sociology). Presently this class takes an urban bus tour. In the future this trip could be adapted to use bikes.

More importantly, the college is beginning to develop a mindset which encourages professors to think about how to connect students to the city. As more tours are

developed by students, it is hoped that one day these tour possibilities could be organized and offered as options to outside groups to take a city tour in which the students themselves could share knowledge gained through developing tours that examine specific themed issues (e.g., historical, sociological, architectural, etc.).

Student Involvement

Walking and biking tours have also given students a number of ways to become involved in their community. For bike tours connected to the Recreation 201 class, students are expected to prepare a two-paragraph introduction to a neighborhood, park, organization, or concept related to the city as well as to write a reflection of the overall experience. In addition, students who have participated in one of the walking or biking tours have gone on to develop tours for other neighborhoods in the city, looking at the historical development of the area as well as its current issues and future potential. In the spring of 2007, one student worked with a professor to create a poster presentation entitled *Urban Bike Tours: Addressing the issue of sprawl* for the National Recreation and Parks Association's National Health and Livability Summit in Atlanta, Georgia. Check the website for a view of the poster presented at this national conference.

Discussion

Connecting students to the Grand Rapids community is a key outcome to both the walking and biking tours that have been developed at Calvin College. The tours that are already in place offer students one means by which they can learn more about their communities as well as a way to become involved. Each of the tours examine how many of the challenges described in this paper are inter-related as well as how the city of Grand Rapids is addressing these issues. These bike tours also encourage students to examine these issues in a physically active manner, modeling healthy behavior for the future.

In addition, it is also important for liberal arts colleges to help model the process whereby students can connect wherever they may settle after graduation. Getting students physically active (walking and biking) is an important lesson to teach students not only for their long-term physical health but also as a way to explore and get to know the communities in which they live. From this standpoint these types of tours could easily be replicated in other locations, capitalizing on the unique resources of any community in which the tours were initiated.

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Service-Learning Partnerships with Local Elementary Schools: Creating Native Wildflower Gardens

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Description of the Project and Relevance to the Course

In the spring term of Biology 112 (Biology for Elementary Education Majors) within the broad topic of ecology, the problematic influence of non-native species (also known as biological pollution) is highlighted. The class is begun by asking students to brainstorm for answers to the question: What traits allow some non-native species to become invasive to the point that they degrade native biodiversity?

From the list generated by students, we focus on one of the answers that inevitably arises – that invasive species may have a greater capacity for reproduction than native species. This, we posit, is a real-life hypothesis that can be tested, and at this point we introduce the students to a local problematic invasive, Purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*). We choose to focus on Purple loosestrife because it is excessively abundant in West Michigan and in wetlands on our own campus. Furthermore, the factors that lead to the unbalanced success of this plant are not well understood by ecologists. Together with the class, we then design an experiment and announce to the students that we are going to carry out this experiment as a class.

The design includes planting six replicates of one hundred seeds, each of Purple loosestrife, the results of which are compared with six replicates of one hundred seeds, each from a variety of native species. We then assign each pair of students in the class one of the species (we do this by pulling species names out of a hat) and distribute to the students a small bag of seeds that had been collected during the previous growing season and over-wintered to break dormancy.

Students count out their allotments of seeds and plant them in small trays (twelve trays per flat, hence the utility of using six replicates) that are kept in our college greenhouse. During the ensuing four weeks, the number of emerged seedlings in each tray are counted and recorded at the beginning of each class period (three times per week). A large data set is thus accumulated. After all germination has ceased, we devote one class period to data processing, which requires students

to calculate mean and standard deviation values that they use to generate graphs (mean seedling emergence over time). These graphs are then used to evaluate the original hypothesis.

Several objectives with regard to the relevance of this project for the course are achieved with this project. Students engage directly in the scientific process, allowing the scientific method to come to life in a real-world context. They see why it is important for an experiment to be designed with an initial hypothesis, why replicates are used and how data can be processed and organized in such a way that affords direct evaluation of the hypothesis. Also, when students are counting their seeds, we have them collect five seeds from each species and tape them onto a common sheet behind each species' name. This master sheet is then photocopied so students can see the huge difference in seed size (Purple loosestrife produces the smallest seeds—over 2 million each year by a single plant). This visual display provides a springboard to discussing the different strategies plants use in attempting to establish their offspring into succeeding generations.

Germination success varies widely among the species, with Purple loosestrife typically the fastest and most successful (as high as 90% after just one week). From the graphs students create, they readily generate evidence that supports the initial hypothesis. This activity also allows students to make predictions, based on their data, for which species are most likely to be the best competitors with Purple loosestrife. Usually some species show markedly low germination or fail to germinate at all. This result provides opportunity to discuss the environmental factors that are required for seed germination to occur.

After counting is finished and graphs have been produced, the scientific inquiry of the project is complete. However, the experiment leaves us with a host of valuable native seedlings. We then use these native seedlings to assist a local school in establishing a native plant garden on the school grounds. This process is initiated with a seemingly innocent class discussion on the types of plants used in home landscaping and why they are used. Students are led to identify a list of benefits for utilizing native plants in urban settings. An appreciation for the value of native plants is developed, including the support of native pollinators, less dependency on chemical inputs, improved genetic diversity by increasing opportunity for cross-pollination, and a deeper appreciation for the indigenous biodiversity of our local ecological context.

We then devote a class period to hosting students from the partner school. College students and elementary students are paired up in small groups, and the college students (future teachers) explain the experiment and their results to the elementary students. After this lesson, which includes an emphasis on the value of planting native wildflowers, the mixed groups together

transplant native seedlings into larger pots (Purple loosestrife, of course, is not included in this transplanting effort). During the last week of class we take Calvin students and the transplanted seedlings to the elementary school where we unite the previously formed groups. Together the groups outplant their seedlings into a site that had been prepared by the elementary students.

Relevant Theory and Research

This simple project elicits significant outcomes (knowledge and seedlings) that help to connect our college students to the ecological and social landscape within which their learning takes place. While higher education tends to emphasize the broadening of our students' intellectual and curricular experience, it often lacks in promoting an understanding of the applied value of what is being learned (Russo, 2003). Typically college education occurs in a type of transcendental vacuum where rootedness in a specific place is ignored (Zencey, 1996). By contrast, when we deepen our students' understanding of their relatedness to a particular physical context, we simultaneously deepen understanding of who they are and the responsibilities they bear as citizens of that particular place (Curry *et al*., 2002).

The service-learning component that concludes this project necessitates an off-campus experience for our students. This experience allows our students opportunity to get to know particular children from the partner school, providing a meaningful bridge to the community in which our campus resides (Boyer 1996). Institutional and personal relationships add meaning to the biological lessons learned, which leads the students to appreciate how the information they acquire in a scientific experiment can be used in ways that promote the beauty and integrity of their social and ecological context (Eyler and Giles, 1999; Plater, 1999). This approach counters classic scientific reductionism and instead emphasizes the place-based context within which all learning takes place (Kloppenburg, 1991).

Pedagogical Suggestions to Foster Student Learning and Engagement

The inquiry-based investigation aspect of this project engages students in the same thought processes as real scientists (Roth, 1995), which is an overarching objective of this activity. Students not only learn *about* the scientific method, but they do so by *taking part in* a meaningful scientific experiment (Krajcik et al., 1999). This investigation incorporates inquiry as a teaching method as well as a learning strategy, as is recommended by the move to reform science education (National Research Council, 2000). Furthermore, this experiment generates information

that legitimately contributes to a deeper understanding of the question being investigated, a question that at present is unresolved by mainstream science (Farnsworth and Ellis, 2001).

During another activity related to the ecological theme of this course, we take students to one of the ponds on campus to collect pond water. At this time we also show the students stands of Purple loosestrife that occur at the pond site. This eyewitness experience supports the timeliness and importance of the germination study we are doing.

The multi-age groups that we assign during the transplanting and outplanting service-learning activities have proved to be invaluable. Each time we have done this activity, we have been impressed with how some students who may not achieve high academic success in a more traditional classroom setting often flourish in these real-life interactions with younger children. This approach clearly engages some students, who are not typically engaged, with more traditional pedagogical strategies (Miles *et al*., 2000).

As part of this project we also ask each pair of students to generate a research paper (three to five pages) on their particular species. In this paper they document the physical attributes of their plant, its distribution, relative abundance, habitat preference, and any ethnobotanical uses the plant afforded the native peoples who lived in the region. At the conclusion of this paper, the students are asked to devote one paragraph to reflection of the activity—what they learned from this project and what they liked and did not like about it. Such reflection heightens the effectiveness of our teaching and also gives these future teachers opportunity to consider elements of good pedagogy.

Finally, the papers produced are collected at the end of the term, graded, and then compiled into a booklet that is given to the partner school. Since the students are aware that this will be the end result of their paper, they are again shown how good scholarship can be a service to their community. This element adds motivation that typically results in very high quality research papers.

Suggestions for Involving Community Leaders

We use seeds that have been collected during the fall semester, mostly by Plant Taxonomy (Biology 346) students, as part of a restoration ecology laboratory activity which is taught by one of the professors of the Biology 112 class. If means are not available for a class or school to collect seeds themselves, native seeds can readily be purchased from (or donated by) a local native plant nursery. It would also be possible for a class to partner with a local garden club for

assistance in obtaining native wildflower seeds. Local seed sources are always preferred—local genotypes will be particularly suited to grow well within the specific context of one's home institution.

The elementary teachers we have worked with have been very enthusiastic about the project. They see this garden as a wonderful teaching opportunity themselves, both for the students who assist in establishing the garden and also for future students who will be able to use the garden as a study area. In addition, with most schools, the principle is also involved and typically makes an appearance during the outplanting activity. I frequently also receive reports from other teachers, administrative assistants, and even custodial staff about the progress of the plants. We are now in the process of compiling a generalized booklet that describes ongoing care and pedagogical suggestions for using these native wildflower gardens in elementary curricula.

Gardens like those described here have also been jointly established with Calvin students and our own campus grounds department, with local municipal parks as well as a YMCA camp. After a recent public presentation on this work, I was approached by a director for an adult assisted-care center who asked if we might consider partnering with her clients in a future effort. We have found this activity to hold great potential for connecting our students to a diversity of community partners from a wide variety of backgrounds. For most of these potential partner organizations, the construction of such a garden is prohibitively expensive; therefore, the assistance we provide makes possible an outcome that would otherwise be unattainable.

Suggestions for Potential Course Placement

This activity, especially the partnership with an elementary school, finds particular resonance with our college students, who are mostly elementary education majors. However, this activity can be done in any introductory biology or botany course. Most college students some day will find themselves to be homeowners and will have urban landscapes they will be caring for. Since many of the most problematic non-native invasive species have their origin as garden elements, the relevance of this activity is broadly applicable.

Although we utilize Purple loosestrife for our project, any number of local invasive species could be substituted. Therefore, the structure of this activity is readily transferable to any context, given a minimal understanding of the local ecology and local flora. The project could even be expanded, if so desired, and students themselves could be given an assignment to identify the most problematic invasive species in their area as well as native species that are threatened by the

invasive plant. Such an assignment would require more time but would likely connect students more intimately to their ecological context.

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"Food For Thought" in Biology 364: Global Health, Environment, and Sustainability

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Purpose

Food is central to our existence and survival, but food supply is increasingly distant from the experience and understanding of many people. Urbanization has spatially separated vast numbers of people from their food source, a culture of food production, and possibly an appropriate concept of the value of food. Yet, as Jared Diamond (2005) eloquently describes in his book *Collapse*, the inability of major cultures, like the Mayans, Khmer, and Anasazi, to survive is strongly linked with the loss of food production capacity due to such issues as deforestation, soil erosion, and loss or overuse of sufficient fresh water supply. One goal of Biology 364: Global Health, Environment, and Sustainability, is to provide context for what healthful food is, where it comes from, what it takes to produce it, and how the various activities involved, impact the quest of a society to become more sustainable.

The "Food For Thought" project of Biology 364 represents an effort to connect largely urban students with the source of food in the context of sustainability issues and to improve students' sense of ecological literacy. David Orr (1992) recounts the loss of ecological literacy in our generation (for example, the failure to recognize linkages, like the color of stream water and food supply and the risks this lack of understanding poses) as a voting and consuming public faces ever growing environmental issues on local and global scales. Orr further suggests this loss of ecological perspective is due in part to students being taught that ecology is unimportant for history, politics, economics, and society. It seems highly advantageous, then, to consider the spectrum of food and food-related issues and their connectedness with health, nutrition, environment, and justice issues in the context of a liberal arts curriculum where the costs and benefits of an action as simple fertilization can be seen on food quantity, environmental quality, and recreational opportunities of a largely urban public.

By grappling with direct and externalized costs of food production (Tegtmeier and Duffy, 2004), by personally observing food production process in a specific place and with common people, students are challenged to rationalize their preconceptions about the interplay between human and environmental health issues, economic models, and social systems. The desired outcome is a clearer understanding of what the real issues are, what trade-offs are apparent in an effort to become more sustainable, and, eventually, what consequences might be associated with application of a developed country's food production paradigm to that of a developing country.

Context

Calvin College is located in an urban area and predominantly draws students from urban and suburban environments. This is not uncommon as the great majority of people in the United States live in urban settings. Even of those living in rural areas, only a small percentage of people are actually involved in food production today. It has not always been this way. Only six decades ago, most Americans were directly involved in some aspect of food production. In this time period, productivity has increased 166% and still accounts for 10% of the U.S. gross domestic product even though available agricultural land has decreased by 25% and employs less than 1% of all workers (Doyle, 2007).

The perspective of food for most Americans, certainly including our students, is that it is inexpensive, readily available in great variety and at all times of year, and, consequently, is largely taken for granted. Just take a jaunt to the local supermarket, and one can sense the largesse, variety of options, twenty-four-hour-a-day accessibility at reasonable cost. Closer examination makes it clear that we seriously underestimate the cost (and maybe value) of our food (Pretty, 2002).

At the same time, students have broad awareness that healthcare costs are an issue in developed countries and that many people in developing countries lack sufficient food of reasonable quality. Epidemics such as heart disease, some cancers, and diabetes are directly related to food consumption and exercise patterns (Lang and Heasman, 2004). Concerns are consistently raised that consumption of pesticide residues in our food may cause cancer or may trigger neurological or immune system diseases. Regular media reports of foods, like hamburger or spinach, are being contaminated with pathogens, which can cause serious illness or death, grab our attention, and raise significant questions in our minds about the safety of the food we purchase from the local supermarket.

Images of starving children in the media haunt our perceptions as well. While root causes and issues resulting in world hunger are hard to decipher, it is clear that 800M of our fellow men, women, and children are not able to consume even the minimum seventeen hundred calories of food per day to keep a sedentary person healthy (Lappe and Collins, 1986). Whether acute or chronic in nature, starvation is a reality in our world, and our students see these issues in the media and, increasingly, firsthand while participating in off-campus classes.

Current Situation

Significant concern and mistrust has been brewing in the public mind about the safety and quality of the food produced and made available to us in the local grocery store, particularly food derived from conventional methods. While much concern relates to food harboring bacterial pathogens of humans, many students do carry perceptions about topics of organic food, pesticide use, and soil erosion. Closer examination of these perceptions and the issues underlying them reveals that many of these opinions, while common in the popular eye, do not bear up well against the facts.

Interest in consuming organic, vegetarian, or vegan diets is growing, and in response, most grocers now carry large organic food sections. Many reasons for this trend exist, with food safety, environmental health, and justice issues ranking high on the list. To the surprise of many, conventional and much organic food is sourced from industrial farm operations, and it is virtually impossible for a consumer to identify where food purchased at the local grocery came from, how it was handled, or how safe it may or may not be for consumption. One survey reported that organic food consumers purchase these products at 10-40% price premiums to achieve improved health and nutrition (67%) or to avoid pesticides (70%) (Whole Foods Market, 2005), contributing to 20% annual growth in the industry since 1990. While organic foods contained lower pesticide and nitrate residue levels than conventionally derived foods, they occasionally contain higher levels of plant secondary metabolites that pose potential benefits or health concerns. In spite of substantial effort to determine if organic food is healthier or more nutritious than conventional food, available evidence does not yet enable researchers to ascertain whether measured differences are of biological significance (Winter and Davis, 2006).

Similarly, while soil erosion is still occurring at a rate faster than soil regeneration and, therefore, should remain a matter of concern, it may not be the most important land use factor. Significant progress has been made mainly by adopting minimum tillage production methods. In a U.S. Department of Agriculture report, Mark Smith (2004) reported that farmers simultaneously reduced soil erosion rate by 40% over a twenty-year period and increased the grain crop yield by

one-fifth. A greater concern than soil erosion may be the permanent erosion of 1.2 million acres of agricultural land annually to uses other than food production.

Another general belief seems to be that big, industrial farmers are more concerned about profits than product safety or environmental quality. While a sustainable farmer must be profitable, it is often not understood that farmers receive a very small proportion of the value stream generated by the sale of finished products in the local grocery store and that much of agricultural land consolidation and increased farm size resulted as a consequence of bankruptcy that ties back to a low-cost food policy and commodity value.

Academic institutions are increasingly sensitive to increasing interest in food and food-related topics ranging across issues of human and environmental health, hunger, and land use. More recently, community-supported agriculture (CSA) networks are being rapidly established in many areas. Many universities and colleges include disciplinary approaches to food issues through agronomy, food science, and environmental science departments and programs. Kenyon College (Kenyon, OH) is a leader in this area as a liberal arts college, having developed the "Food For Thought (FFT)" program over the past ten years. FFT represents a holistic approach to these issues that spans research, education, operational, and outreach efforts. Specific initiatives include accessing local (and increasingly organic) food by college food services; building a sustainable local market; weaving food issues through the art and sciences curriculum; developing exhibits, presentations, and publications that convey information about the issues; and hosting conferences. The multiplicity and connectedness of issues revolving around food that touch all dimensions of life, particularly considering linkages between urban and rural elements of developed society, lend itself well, to study within the context of liberal arts.

Biology 364: Global Health, Environment, and Sustainability

Biology 364 is a course co-listed with the Biology Department and International Development Program. The only core requirement is a general biology course for non-majors. As such, this course is intended to develop a synthetic perspective, linking biological principles with health and environmental sustainability issues in global context. Food serves as a useful model because it is central to these linkages in the context of both developed and developing countries. Before being able to compare food production systems of developed countries with those of developing countries, however, students needed to develop a clear and realistic understanding of the situation in a developed country such as the United States. A major problem is that most urban students have little understanding of where their food comes from and what it takes to produce it. Most

have never visited a farm, know how big a cow is, or where milk actually comes from. Most do not know what steps take place relative to the process of planting, growing, harvesting, processing, packaging, marketing, and eventual buying and consumption.

The primary goals of the "Food For Thought" project in Biology 364 were to:

- Give students firsthand experience of where food comes from by touring a farm.
- Enhance accurate understanding of what the food production issues and trade-offs are by dialoging with the farmer.
- Enable students to evaluate the sustainability of various food production practices by reporting farm visit observations to the class and evaluating the sustainability of these practices.

"Food For Thought" Project Process

The course instructor identified a number of growers and made telephone calls to them explaining the goals of the course, the project, and what would be expected of the growers and the students. The grower was asked to give a brief walking tour of their farm and to give an interview to one group of two to three students. With the growers' consent, they were told that the student group would call to make an appointment, would travel to their farm for the visit, and would ask them questions about what they produce, how they produce their product, and about their views on sustainability. Of the farmers asked, all indicated willingness to participate. A wide variety of farm types were identified, including large and organic vegetable farms, industrial and family dairy farms, organic and conventional orchards, and grain production farms. Each farm was located within a thirty mile radius of the college. A couple of growers indicated their desire to keep interviews short. In the end, however, discussions typically lasted significantly longer than expected.

Classroom time was devoted to developing the concept of sustainability and providing a primer on interviewing skills in preparation for on-farm visits by student groups. Sustainability has been broadly defined as a concept in which three goals must be satisfied simultaneously: environmental, economic, and social. No action, process, movement, or business can be truly sustainable unless it satisfies all three areas. For example, a business that meets environmental and social obligations while not being economically sound is unsustainable.

Behaviors and attitudes associated with successful interviews were presented in class to help student groups plan roles and responsibilities during the interview. A common set of questions was developed for each interview that began with a series of informational or fact-finding questions and transitioned to a series of feeling-finding questions focused on understanding

farmer-thinking about why they conduct operations as they do. Sample interview questions follow:

- Describe your food production operation. How long have you operated? What do you produce?
- How has your operation changed over time?
- What are some features you like, and don't like, about farming?
- What are your major business risks?
- How does your product impact the health of consumers? The environment?
- How is the way you produce food sustainable? How is it not?
- What has changed to become more sustainable?
- What does the Calvin College community need to know about your business? How might Calvin support your business?

Interviews were to be tape-recorded, if allowed by the farmer. Groups positioned themselves to have one or two students to be the primary point of discussion and one to be a scribe. Each group was challenged to discuss the questions before the interview and to try to anticipate how the interviewee might respond to the various questions so that seamless dialogue might more naturally occur during the interview.

Student groups were provided with a tape recorder and tape as well as a grower's name, address, and telephone number. The students were instructed to contact the grower, set up an appointment, visit the farm, and conduct the interview all in a period of two weeks. Post-interview, the students were to develop a five-to-seven-minute classroom group presentation to share the interview results.

After the interview, each group was challenged to assess and defend their perception of the sustainability of the farm they visited. Classroom presentations included a description of the farm; key lessons learned from the interview about that operation; the group's sustainability ratings (on a 1-5 scale, where 1 represents "fully sustainable") for each dimension of sustainability, from an environmental, economic, and social perspective. After the presentation, each class member was asked to come up with their own overall sustainability rating for the operation. A brief discussion followed that focused on individuals sharing why they rated as they did and what, if anything, could or should be done to improve sustainability if they were in charge of that operation. Finally, each individual was to write a three-to-five-page paper in which to report and rationalize personal

and class observations for their farm visit, concluding with a reflection about what they learned from their farm visit and from their exposure to farm visits as reported by their peers.

Learning from Farm Visits

Assessment of the interview created a tremendous amount of debate within groups while preparing for the verbal report to the class. Students found that it took significant effort to understand ideas the grower was attempting to communicate due, in part, to very different frames of reference between the grower and the students. Issues raised by the grower were often significantly different from what the students expected. For example, students were surprised to consistently hear that farmers care deeply about soil quality, the environment they farm in, or the quality of the food they produce—regardless of farm size or organic/conventional approach. Students were surprised to learn that many farmers, across a broad range of product types and production systems, willingly accept costs of operation to address some environmental issue, that while a healthy bottom line is fundamental to staying in business, it was not the most important feature. The interview tapes provided a welcome opportunity for groups to listen again to the discussion as a way of developing a more uniform perception of the grower's message.

Requiring the group to agree upon a specific rating for each dimension of sustainability prior to class presentation served as a lightning rod for deeper discussions within groups. Issues debated within groups often were redressed later during the broader class discussion. Students found their own perceptions going into the interview were surprisingly different from one another and sometimes poorly aligned with realities discovered during the interviews. The practical requirement of trade-offs was clearly illustrated in these discussions as the class compared production systems in the context of sustainability dimensions. For example, when one operation seemed economically viable, sacrifices might have been made in the social dimension. Or if another operation was heavily focused in the environmental dimension, economic health might have been in jeopardy.

Feedback from growers at the conclusion of the class indicated that the farmers felt a great sense of appreciation that the students would take the time to come to their farm and invest themselves in learning about their issues. Farmers articulated several times that they were glad that people cared enough about food production questions to visit and dialogue. Farmers often mentioned that they know American society does not understand well what they do but that they have little opportunity to share what they have learned through years of experience. Other farmers indicated that dialogue with students helped open their eyes so that they now more clearly understand how

they are perceived by the urban public. All have indicated interest in being visited by similar student groups in following years.

Conclusion

A major goal of this project was to face students with the realities of food production process and issues of sustainability, thereby gaining deeper understanding of where our food comes from and issues revolving around its production within developed societies. While not solving specific problems, it certainly seems as though our largely urban student perceptions are significantly more informed about actual local rural issues of food production. Broadly held beliefs before the farm visits include ideas that organic is good, big farms are bad, soil erosion is the number one problem, and that farmers don't really care about quality as long as they make money. While opinions about these beliefs may or may not have changed in fundamental ways, they certainly became much more informed about what the issues are, when connected with people in rural society.

Students did find that local markets are preferred by the grower, if only they were accessible, that both conventional and organic production systems offer trade-offs, that land development represents an ultimate source of "erosion" from agriculture, that farmers intimately care about their soil and go to great lengths to slow soil loss, and that often a farmer will do what is right, even if it costs them money or reduces profits. It became evident and personal that farmer problems are connected to urban problems and those urban problems also become farmer problems. Intentional dialogue between these parties has tremendous potential to help urban and rural societies work together for the greater good and that building sustainable societies in this time of declining natural resources and climbing energy costs will require better common understanding and constructive dialogue.

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Transforming a Nursing Department by Emphasizing Place and Partnership

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Introduction:

Community engagement in higher education can vary in how it is operationalized. One type of engagement may involve a faculty member forming a relationship in the community so that a course could educate students while providing a service to the community. A different type of engagement may involve not only providing a community service but having place, shape course content and experiences. Is there a way that higher education can increase the breadth and depth of community engagement beyond a single course or single faculty member? Should higher education be striving for more? What would it look like to have a level of engagement where place actually informs what you do as a department?

The following case study provides a unique example of how place shaped a department, curriculum, student practice, and faculty scholarship.

Context:

Calvin College houses a nursing program which awards baccalaureate degrees to approximately sixty students annually. The four-year nursing program is grounded in the liberal arts. The first two years of coursework are devoted strictly to the liberal arts. All of the nursing coursework occurs during the last two years. By having a strong emphasis on liberal arts prior to the nursing program, students come into the program with a rich knowledge base. Health is complex and may require various disciplinary approaches. Students are more effective in their nursing care when they have an understanding of the deeper issues that affect the health of individuals, families, and communities and of how to address these issues.

In 2002, the Nursing Department initiated a new community-based nursing curriculum. The curriculum was designed in response to trends in health care, current nursing literature, and recommendations from accrediting bodies of nursing (American Association of Colleges of

Nursing, 1998; Pew Health Professions Commission, 1998; Community Campus Partnerships for Health).

In addition, the curriculum was created to flow from the vision and mission of Calvin College. Calvin College seeks to not only serve the internal community, but to also serve the external community, promoting social justice and reconciliation (Calvin College, 2002).

Lastly, the new curriculum was influenced by a unique neighborhood partnership piloted by a couple of nursing faculty a few years prior to the curriculum revision.

Transformation of a Nursing Department

In 1997, two faculty members piloted a partnership with one underserved urban neighborhood, where service to the community was emphasized as much as the student learning. As the experience and relationship grew, the partnership began, in turn, to impact student practice and the faculty member. During this time, the department began to see the benefits of the experience and embrace the thought of a new approach to student practicum experiences. All baccalaureate nursing programs have a community practicum component where students spend time outside of the acute care setting. Traditionally these experiences have involved providing nursing care to a population already being cared for by other community nurses and health care agencies. This approach occasionally resulted in community residents feeling like they were being *used* for student learning, agency staff displaying weariness in the extra time demanded on them to oversee a student, competition for community sites among local schools of nursing, and faculty feeling challenged to promote an ideal learning experience in the midst of the previous three challenges. In contrast, the piloted partnership led to community agencies viewing nursing students as an asset, residents feeling like they benefitted from nursing student activities, and students who were excited about an educational experience that actually met a gap in health care rather than duplicating care.

When faculty began writing the new curriculum, the department decided to replicate the piloted approach throughout the curriculum and apply it to all students in their community practicums rather than just a few in the pilot. To accomplish this goal, the Nursing Department formed partnerships with two additional underserved, low-income neighborhoods in the surrounding urban area. Relationships were built with residents and service providers in the two new neighborhoods before initiation of the curriculum. The neighborhood was assured that the Nursing Department was committed to a long-term relationship where effort would be made to

match student-learning experiences with the strengths and needs of each neighborhood. The Nursing Department desired an even deeper partnership than in the pilot where community voice would drive student-learning experiences across the curriculum. During the first two years of the new curriculum, community-based participatory research methods were used to listen to the voice of the neighborhood (Heffner, Zandee, & Schwander, 2002). Some of the top neighborhood concerns voiced by residents were access to health care, hypertension, diabetes, asthma, depression, unintended pregnancies, and lead poisoning. Action plans were written in collaboration with residents and neighborhood providers to match specific strengths and needs identified by each neighborhood with strengths and learning needs of nursing students. Through this process, place began to shape student practice across the curriculum.

The nursing curriculum has four semesters of coursework, consisting of theory, lab, and practicum experiences. In the first semester, students have a five-week practicum experience of thirteen hours a week in their neighborhood, providing nursing care to individuals within the context of their family and community. Some activities students participate in include: providing nursing care at a neighborhood clinic, teaching health education at neighborhood schools, promoting health among children at risk for diabetes, and providing blood pressure and blood sugar screenings at various neighborhood sites. During the second semester a portion of the students return to their neighborhood for fifteen hours of practicum time providing asthma education and care. During the fourth and final semester of the nursing program, students return again to their neighborhood of origin to learn how to provide nursing care to the neighborhood as a whole. For this practicum experience, students spend thirteen hours a week for six weeks. Some activities students participate in include: community health fairs, assessment and health education for diabetics, lead-poisoning screening and education, and work with a community health worker (neighborhood resident) promoting health and access to care for the neighborhood.

By investing in a neighborhood as place and having students return to that neighborhood across the curriculum, not only do students learn about the role of the community health nurse, but students wrestle with deeper issues such as disparities in health, injustice, and how to apply the core virtues of the college's curriculum (such as diligence, patience, courage, creativity, empathy, humility) to a specific neighborhood in which they are engaged. Students see the value of long-term commitment to their community by building on the work done previously by students and casting a vision of health in their neighborhood for the future. Students also feel a sense of pride that their educational experience was not solely for their benefit alone. They graduate knowing that they have made a significant impact on the health of the most vulnerable in the city.

Because the department's investment in place flowed so closely to the mission of the college, the administration was very supportive of department efforts from the beginning. One key to successful community partnerships was having the necessary staff to develop, maintain, and sustain the partnerships. The Nursing Department created a position for one part-time faculty to oversee the neighborhood partnerships as a whole and built in time for three neighborhood-coordinator faculty (one per neighborhood) to oversee student activities along with strengthening relationships in each neighborhood (Feenstra, Gordon, Hansen, & Zandee, 2006). These unique roles were affirmed and supported by the administration. An exciting, additional result of these new faculty roles was a level of engagement that not only allowed faculty to accomplish their curriculum responsibilities but to act as a living example of commitment to place. Outside of their job, each neighborhood-coordinator faculty member volunteers at the neighborhood clinic, participates on neighborhood boards, or serves in various neighborhood functions. This deepened investment by faculty infiltrates their teaching and models a true commitment to place to students.

Place and partnership have also made a significant impact on departmental scholarship. Faculty have pursued grants, conducted research, and disseminated results both locally and nationally in an effort to address concerns identified by each neighborhood, promote social change, and impact the future of how community practicums are taught in schools of nursing. The interesting part of this impact was that not only did place increase scholarship opportunities for faculty, but it actually shaped what topics faculty were researching and grants they were pursuing.

Lastly, having a department committed to partnership and place has opened doors to collaborate with other departments on campus. The Nursing Department has sought the help of other disciplines when nursing alone was unable to meet the needs identified in their neighborhood or felt that collaboration would allow the issue to be addressed more effectively. In addition, other disciplines on campus have approached nursing when they were seeking to expand community-learning opportunities for students. New opportunities for collaboration have also expanded for the Nursing Department with those external to the college. Over the past five years, nursing has had the opportunity to collaborate with community agencies and neighboring colleges and universities in areas of scholarship and practice within the partnering neighborhoods.

Involving Community Leaders

It was very important for the Nursing Department to have community leaders involved prior to establishing neighborhood partnerships. Every effort was made to link with key city/county

service providers to inform them of the college's intentions along with looking for ways to meet gaps in care rather than duplicate care. Time was also spent connecting with neighborhood leaders, both formal and informal. These leaders helped identify the neighborhoods' strengths and needs, and brought ideas as to how to meet the neighborhood needs.

Even more important, however, was involving residents themselves. This commitment to resident voice and involvement is very challenging but absolutely crucial to success. Residents need to not only be involved in identifying the strengths and health concerns for their neighborhood but also the solutions. They then need to have an ongoing formal voice as the community partnership grows and evolves over time so that place can accurately inform what is done as a department.

Suggestions for Other Departments

There is tremendous potential when a whole department is supportive and united in their approach to community engagement. It can deepen student learning, increase faculty scholarship opportunities, open doors for collaboration within and outside of the college, and significantly impact the community.

Faculty who have been including a service-learning component into a single course or have been involved in some level of community engagement may want to consider a conversation with their department regarding the future of those experiences. Could the present engagement increase in breadth and depth? Are there ways that community needs should be shaping faculty scholarship, student activities, or the curriculum? Are there other issues in the surrounding community that the department could address collectively?

Dialogue is at least a starting point to increase faculty buy-in, discuss benefits and barriers, and work towards being united. The potential is great, there just needs to be someone to take a leadership role in drawing it out.

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Healthy
Homes
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Get the Lead Out! Retailer Survey

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Introduction

In 2002, the Nursing Department at Calvin College began partnering with the local *Get the Lead Out!* collaborative to impact the disproportionately high incidence of childhood lead poisoning in the low-income neighborhoods of the city of Grand Rapids. *Get the Lead Out!* is a locally developed campaign that coalesces a variety of partners from various disciplines to holistically address the conditions that cause childhood lead poisoning. Partners come from areas of health care, housing, early childhood development, government, academia, community-based organizations, and the environmental movement. The campaign is facilitated by the Healthy Homes Coalition of West Michigan, a nonprofit organization.

The involvement of the Calvin College Nursing Department in *Get the Lead Out!* has been primarily through the community health rotation of the students' senior-year practicum. Nursing students have been involved in a wide variety of childhood lead poisoning prevention activities, including community awareness, blood lead-testing drives, and parent education.

Other departments at Calvin have also been introduced to the work of *Get the Lead Out!* through the partnership with the Nursing Department. Students from both the Sociology and Psychology Departments have worked with the campaign to offer lead dust sampling assistance to low-income households—a simple way for homeowners to know the relative risk of the lead levels in their home. In particular, a health psychology class is studying the relationships between lead dust levels, psychological indicators, and the likelihood a family will take preventive action.

In addition, a social work class has connected with the Healthy Homes Coalition to promote awareness of radon. Like lead, radon is a health hazard found in housing for which prevention is

the best strategy. The social work class is conducting community education and offering free radon testing for interested homeowners.

This case study will explore a specific course of activities that began in 2005 when Calvin nursing faculty participated in discussions about household sources of lead poisoning. One significant source is the lead-based paint dust and residue created when do-it-yourself homeowners and untrained rental maintenance crews use unsafe work practices. Ensuring that homeowners and maintenance staff use Lead Safe Work Practices (LSWP) is an essential but daunting task.

The role of home remodeling suppliers and retailers was discussed at a *Get the Lead Out!* Outreach Committee meeting and the group explored the retailer accountability program used by Improving Kids' Environments in Indianapolis, Indiana (www.ikecoalition.org/stores.htm). The group decided to conduct a similar study with some unique differences. Given the *Get the Lead Out!* collaborative's strategy of engaging a wide variety of stakeholders as partners, the group elected not to "blind shop" the retailers and not to release negative findings about specific businesses. Securing informed consent at the beginning of the study allowed Calvin, Grand Valley State University, and the collaborative the opportunity to engage the retailers as enthusiastic partners in their efforts to end childhood lead poisoning. Obtaining consent and promising anonymity also satisfied Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements.

Description of the Project

The Retailer Survey project was designed by the Calvin Nursing Department in late 2005 in partnership with the other members of the *Get the Lead Out!* Outreach Committee; most notably the Grand Valley State University (GVSU) Kirkhof School of Nursing, the Healthy Homes Coalition, and the Kent County Health Department. The goal of the project was to collect base-line information about the practices of forty paint and building supply retailers serving four low-income, central city neighborhoods (ten retailers per neighborhood). The study sought to assess the knowledge of paint retailers regarding LSWP, evaluate inventory of products and display of information on LSWP, and lay the groundwork for future engagement of retail industry.

Collaboratively, Calvin and GVSU designed survey tools and an approach that would meet with IRB approval. The Healthy Homes Coalition assisted by providing technical expertise regarding LSWP and the needed supplies and materials. Existing community and faith-based partners

working with Calvin (three neighborhoods) and GVSU (one neighborhood) identified key retailers.

In the spring of 2006, nursing students from both colleges initiated contact with forty retailers using a prepared telephone script to schedule a session for data collection. Thirty-seven of the retailers (92.5%) agreed to participate.

Teams of two students then visited each retailer to collect data using a prepared script and survey. Students were instructed to record both survey participant comments as well as empirical observations of the store environment. Thirty-two surveys (80%) were satisfactorily completed, including consent forms.

The survey investigated LSWP educational materials provided to customers, products sold, staff training, and customer education. A narrow majority of retailers stocked some of the products needed for LSWP. The vast majority provided little or no educational materials and conducted no employee or customer education. Forty percent of retailers surveyed failed to answer even one of the questions satisfactorily.

The study was completed in June 2006 and provided students, faculty and the *Get the Lead Out!* Outreach Committee clear indication that there is a need to 1) disseminate information to retailers, 2) develop educational programs on LSWP for retailers and customers, and 3) build sustainable collaborations and projects.

Following the study, Calvin and GVSU nursing students developed a scripted approach and returned to the surveyed paint retailers in the spring and early summer of 2007 to ensure that they have adequate educational materials and to offer the assistance of *Get the Lead Out!* in training retailer staff. Students have also developed, at the request of one retailer, a succinct, one-page fact sheet that includes local resources for homeowners and maintenance staff. This fact sheet was shared with many who participated, which resulted in an additional retailer requesting the fact sheet in Spanish, which was accomplished and welcomed by other retailers.

Plans to sustain this program include re-surveying participants in 2008 to measure improvement (and offering the service to new retailers). It is anticipated that ongoing measurement will take place in even-numbered years, with education and technical assistance during the years in between.

Project Relevance to the Course Being Taught

Opportunities to engage nursing students in community health experiences are becoming more and more difficult as the public health infrastructure in Michigan is being challenged with ongoing reductions in funding. To that end, this project has demonstrated how community health concepts can be taught outside of the context of more formal government health programs. This project illustrates fully that community and public health are not solely in the governmental domain, but can also be advanced through the collaborative work of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the private sector.

Students participating in this project experienced firsthand the role of NGOs in promoting public health. Leading the local *Get the Lead Out!* campaign to eliminate childhood lead poisoning, the Healthy Homes Coalition worked with students to ensure that they understood the subject matter and its local context. This allowed the students to study and work with a community health issue in a real-world context with the support of knowledgeable staff. It also allowed them to see the breadth of activities that are required to address a complex issue like childhood lead poisoning.

The study also allowed students to engage with the private sector to understand how basic business principles intersect with community health priorities and to wrestle with the challenges of the often-divergent priorities of these two arenas.

Through this study, students were able to experience firsthand the limitations external to health care upon a population at risk. While their primary concern is the health of children, students explored the other factors that allow conditions to exist that put children at risk. They had the opportunity to work firsthand with individuals and organizations that are attempting to mitigate the problem through solutions found outside of traditional health care. They also had the opportunity to work with retailers in the private sector—a group that has a potentially contrasting self-interest. The students learned how to speak to the self-interests of these retailers. For example, students explained the justification for an investment in staff training by explaining how knowledgeable staff might be able to sell additional LSWP products, thus increasing sales.

Students also learned how to collaborate. Not only were students required to work in teams, but also the project was coordinated between two institutions of higher education. In addition, efforts needed to be coordinated with NGOs, public health, and the private sector. The coordination required of this project provided an excellent learning opportunity regarding collaboration and clear communication.

Relevant Theory and Research

The theory and research directly related to impacting the role of paint retailers is limited. No research studying the effectiveness of this activity as a pedagogical approach for undergraduate students could be located. However, existing research on lead hazards in U.S. housing and documentation of outreach efforts in Hartford, Connecticut and in New Jersey are instructive to the efforts of the Calvin campaign.

In 2002, David Jacobs, then director of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Office of Healthy Homes and Lead Hazard Control, published the first comprehensive assessment of the extent of lead hazards in U.S. housing. With hazards in an estimated 24-27 million housing units, the conclusions of this study made numerous points relevant to working collaboratively with paint retailers.

According to Jacobs, "despite a large decline in the number of housing units with lead-based paint from 1990 to 2000, there are still millions remaining with hazards. Resources should be directed to those most likely to cause childhood lead poisoning: older housing units with lead-based paint hazards that are occupied by (or likely to be occupied by) children under six years of age and are low-income and/or are undergoing certain housing rehabilitation or maintenance that disturbs surfaces coated with lead-based paint. Hazard controls should focus on deteriorated lead based paint, windows, doors, dust, and bare soil in play areas."[10] This conclusion supports the Calvin focus upon retailers that serve low-income neighborhoods in the city of Grand Rapids as identified by neighborhood residents.

Building capacity among retailers to educate consumers is also supported by Jacob's observation that "(f)urther efforts are needed to improve maintenance standards by incorporating lead-safe work practices into routine housing operations, especially in low-income housing. Further efforts are also needed to educate maintenance and housing rehabilitation workers, property owners, parents, and others to help ensure that lead-based paint remaining in millions of houses does not become hazardous and pose future risks to millions of children born into or occupying such houses in the coming decades."

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[10] Jacobs DE, Clickner RP, Zhou JY, Viet SM, Marker DA, Rogers JW, Zeldin DC, Broene P, Friedman W. The Prevalence of Lead-based Paint Hazards in U.S. Housing. *Environ Health Perspect* 2002; 110(10); 599606.

An informal study conducted in Hartford, Connecticut suggests the relative effectiveness of educational outreach through retailers versus other outreach and education strategies. While other strategies were more effective in Hartford, local program evaluation revealed that 36.8% of one hundred eighty respondents reported recalling lead safety messages displayed at retailers.[11]

The Hartford campaign consisted of an educational table in front of a local hardware store from March through April in 2000 and 2001, in conjunction with the U.S. EPA's "Keep It Clean" campaign. "The goal was to reach patrons and pedestrians with messages about lead poisoning and lead-safe work practices and to inform residents that further information could be obtained at the Hartford Health Department."

The ranking of the campaign components reveals the relative effectiveness of their display at the hardware store. When respondents were asked to recall where they received their lead safety message, the percentage of recall, from highest to lowest, was as follows: "newspaper advertisements, signage on buses, billboards, signage on sanitation trucks, displays at stores, advertisements on milk/juice containers, postmarks, art displays, and video." Eleven percent of respondents reported that "they took specific steps to learn more about or prevent lead poisoning" as prompted by the hardware store display.

Rutgers Cooperative Extension conducted two outreach efforts in collaboration with retailers in New Jersey. While strict evaluation of their program's effectiveness was not obtained, they reported the following observations. "An important side effect of this outreach was the informal education provided to store staff as our outreach worker replenished brochures. Here, some significant misperceptions among store personnel were put to rest." And, "(a)fter multiple visits, it became evident that the outreach worker became a trusted expert in the eyes of store personnel. It was also evident that their understanding and attitudes regarding the lead paint problem were enhanced."[12]

The documented efforts in Connecticut and New Jersey, along with the Calvin experience, point to the value of these activities to improving local community capacity. Observation of these

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[11] McLaughlin T, Humphries, Jr. O, NguyenT, Maljanian R, McCormack K. "Getting the Lead Out" in Hartford Connecticut: A multifaceted Lead-Poisoning Awareness Campaign. *Environ Health Perspect* 2004; 112(1).

[12] Ponessa J. Educational Outreach in a Large Retail Chain: Opportunities, Challenges, and Suggested Approaches. *Journal of Extension* 2003: 41(2) www.joe.org/joe/2003april/a6.shtml

outcomes by nursing students can reasonably be assumed to contribute to their experience and awareness that a community and public health agenda can be advanced through the collaborative work of local public health, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the private sector.

Pedagogical Suggestions to Foster Student Learning and Engagement

The retailer survey provides a number of opportunities for fostering student learning. To begin with, students are required to have a basic understanding of childhood lead poisoning and its causes. This fits with nursing students' need to understand the complexities of environmental health problems. In the case of the Calvin project, this was accomplished by inviting in a guest speaker from the Healthy Homes Coalition to provide an overview. Students could also be required to research childhood lead poisoning prevention methodologies.

Nursing students are further engaged in the project through the survey itself. By delivering the survey, the students gain firsthand experience with the private sector and come to understand the private sector's role in the prevention of childhood lead poisoning. Student experience is at first limited to the surveys that they complete. Having students share their experiences with their peers should broaden individual experience. Discussion about the findings of the entire class can help students see patterns, allowing them to engage in community problem solving.

After completing the surveys, students return to share results with the individual retailers. This affords an excellent opportunity for students to demonstrate mastery of the subject matter by requiring them to share expertise. In numerous cases, students took this requirement quite seriously and looked for educational and sample materials to share with the retailers. Students could be required to research and develop educational packets for participating retailers.

The following year, the students returned to the retailers to share with them recommendations for best practices. This provided an excellent opportunity for the new rotation of students to also engage in community problem solving as they reviewed the results of the previous year's study. Calvin students also took this opportunity to develop additional educational and outreach materials for the retailers that included local information and resources.

While the methodology of the survey must be standardized for sound data collection, this project affords numerous opportunities for students to research the subject matter, to engage in community problem solving and to demonstrate a mastery of the material by sharing it with others.

Suggestions for Involving Community Leaders in the Design of a Locally Situated Problem

Even if a local coalition for the prevention of childhood lead poisoning does not exist, there are many opportunities to engage local community leaders in the design and implementation of such a study. Foremost, local public health departments in most areas of the United States are engaged in childhood lead-poisoning prevention and case surveillance to some degree. Since 1998, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention required that state health departments conduct rigorous surveillance of childhood lead poisoning, which most often has resulted in the engagement of local public health. State and local public health can be excellent resources for the identification of high-risk areas and prevention resources.

At the federal level, Medicaid requires providers to test all enrolled children at one and two years of age. This requirement has gotten the attention of public and private health providers alike.

Beyond public health, other health leaders are also often interested in childhood lead poisoning. Sometimes health provider interest is not limited to lead poisoning, but extends to a wider collection of children's environmental health issues such as asthma triggers, toxins in the homes, carbon monoxide, and more. In some communities, it may be more beneficial to look at wider children's environmental health issues, rather than focusing specifically on lead poisoning. The survey could easily be adapted to include such topics as pesticides, carbon monoxide detectors, and other health issues (as has been done by the Improving Kids' Environments in Indianapolis).

Housing professionals are another source of support. Non-profit housing advocates are often interested in the provision of safe, affordable housing. Tenant unions also have an interest in safe housing. In many cases, non-profit housing providers use federal funding and, therefore, are held to lead safety standards that have raised their concern for this issue. In the private sector, guilds and associations may be interested in lead-safe work practices as a capacity building issue and may collaborate for training and education.

Early childhood advocates are also natural allies. Working with families on healthy childhood development, these organizations know about and are concerned with the hazards of lead and other children's environmental health issues. Some, like Head Start, are required to engage families in blood lead testing. Many are focused on primary prevention and are dedicated to providing healthy living environments for children.

The strongest advocates at the local level often are grassroots community-based organizations and environmental advocates. Neighborhood organizations, ethnic organizations, ACORN, local

chapters of the Sierra Club, and many others have provided local leadership in many communities. These groups often focus upon environmental justice and may have a high level of interest in gaining the cooperation of retailers and other corporate citizens.

Suggestions for Potential Course Placement of a Case Study

In the case of Calvin College, this study was conducted in the nursing program. Replication in nursing or other health sciences is recommended. However, this project also lends itself to replication in other departments.

The study could be conducted in social work or sociology, looking at the social dynamics involved in educating low-income, do-it-yourself homeowners as well as how to engage the private sector in solving community problems.

The study could also be integrated into business curriculum, looking at the role of small business owners in the avoidance of harm. This project also fits well with the current emphasis in many business programs as they begin looking at the concept of sustainability, particularly as it relates to the promotion of social justice.

The project could also be connected to studies in public policy. The greatest gains in the reduction of childhood lead poisoning in the United States have come primarily as a result of public policy decisions. In 2003, the National Paint and Coatings Association signed a binding agreement committing to consumer education with the attorneys general of forty-six states, four U.S. territories, and the District of Columbia. The effectiveness of and compliance with this agreement could be studied.

For further information on the Calvin College / GVSU *Get the Lead Out!* Paint Retailer Survey, feel free to contact Paul Haan at the Healthy Homes Coalition of West Michigan, (616) 734-9443, paul@healthyhomescoalition.org.

Calvin Environmental Assessment Program (CEAP)

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Introduction

How do you construct your curriculum to enhance its embeddedness with your place, without adding extra demands on faculty? How do you integrate research, expertise, and teaching into the life of the community in order to enhance learning and the development of virtues, allowing students and faculty to live more whole lives?

In higher education we work at challenging students to see issues in a framework that goes beyond the limitations of their parochial or locally based experiences—college is meant to be a broadening experience. This is easy because most faculty are themselves "rootless professors," using the words of Eric Zencey (1996). Professors are supposed to belong to the world of ideas rather than places. An alternative is to see education as a deepening of local understanding. When we deepen our understanding of the places where we live we gain a greater understanding of who we are, the intricacies of our place, and our responsibilities. Then we may in turn have the skills to learn to appreciate and care for other places. Perhaps broadening experiences include the route of understanding the "other" via a deepening of our understanding of whom and where we are. Historian Christopher Lasch (1991) claimed that allegiance to the "world" is ineffective because it stretches our capacity for loyalty too thin. In reality, we love particular people and places. Abstract ideals need to be made concrete through loving, understanding, and caring for particular people and places.

The Calvin Environmental Assessment Program (CEAP) builds on this need to serve and show caretaking through the process of paying attention to that which is closest at hand. CEAP involves faculty, across the college but mainly in the sciences, who each dedicate regular lab sessions or projects to collecting data that contribute to an overall assessment of the environment of the campus and surroundings areas. CEAP is informed by debates in philosophy of science over the particularity versus the universality of knowledge, exemplifying the science of local knowledge and the importance of the embeddedness of knowledge. CEAP also reflects the educational philosophy of Nel Noddings. CEAP models Noddings's care theory pedagogy which calls for the embeddedness of the learning in caring relationships and real life settings.

CEAP involves more than twenty courses as well as four hundred students across the college, mainly in the sciences. Faculty dedicate regular lab sessions or course projects to collecting data that contribute to an overall assessment of the environment of the campus and surroundings areas. These studies are brought together in a once-a-semester event which involves a poster session and CEAP lecture. In addition, faculty and some students meet for a workshop each summer to review and plan. The Calvin Environmental Assessment Program serves the liberal arts through the encouragement of cross-disciplinary learning, the linking of larger questions typical of the liberal arts (for example, what does it mean to live the "good life?") with the operationalization of the answers to these types of questions, and the development of the virtue of stewardship through the development of habits of stewardship based on attentiveness to place.

CEAP has led to an increase in cross-disciplinary interaction, the creation of a point of engagement with the planning process, a growing connection between word and deed, and a sense of the wholeness of research, teaching, and personal commitments. CEAP has provided a basis of getting faculty involved in community issues, based on their expertise, but within the time and subject matter constraints found within the sciences. The most recent direction of CEAP has been to expand our sense of belonging and responsibility to the Plaster Creek Watershed. Thus research and organizational efforts have moved up in scale, incorporating community partners in the effort.

CEAP and Pedagogy

CEAP presents several advantages in terms of liberal arts pedagogy. First, students have the potential of encountering CEAP through many classes, multiple times, and at multiple levels. This learning builds on itself, and grows with the students' abilities. Lower-level courses have tended to take on the task of environmental monitoring of elements like water and air quality. Upper-level students have taken on more complex tasks. Secondly, CEAP provides students with a greater understanding of the interdisciplinary nature of problems and the role of group work in their solutions by providing a context within which data must be shared across disciplines and through formal working groups of courses. For example, geography students collected data on students' use of campus space, to be analyzed by an advanced statistics class. This sharing of data forced the geography students to be thorough and to pay closer attention to the reporting format of the data collection because others depended on their clarity and because it was going to be used for campus planning. Classes sometimes form working teams and share data and specialties, modeling real-world, working-group strategies. The data form the basis for

recommended changes in campus policies, for programs that target individual behavioral changes, and for identifying issues that involve and impact the adjacent neighborhoods and thus form the basis for cooperative action and planning. Thirdly, CEAP classroom projects are underlain with the goal of social change through individual student transformation as well as institutional change through increased visibility and accurate data collection.

CEAP and the Local Community

The CEAP project provides a context for engagement with the larger neighborhood and the larger Grand Rapids urban area. For example, as the CEAP group studied the issue of planning on our own campus we encountered the larger issue of mass transit in the Grand Rapids region. This has led to more partnerships with the local transit authority. Likewise, the CEAP garbology project, which tracks the nature of Calvin College's trash, has raised issues of recycling behavior on campus but also the issue of the regional recycled material market and Calvin's place in this regional problem. Thus questions that start out as campus questions, naturally draw the campus into the regional dialogue.

CEAP is a public project in that the end-of-the-semester poster sessions are open to the public and neighbors surrounding Calvin College, and regional environmental groups are specifically invited to these events as well as the larger community. At the recent tenth anniversary of CEAP, students and faculty combined the poster session with a field day where families were encouraged to come to campus and work through activities at different environmental stations across campus. The CEAP website is also a public website, used by courses as a depository of their research results. The data is occasionally used by people from outside the campus. CEAP blurs the boundaries between academic learning and student life, between academic programs and campus planning, as well as between the campus and the surrounding community.

The Role of CEAP in Courses

The CEAP program has great flexibility in terms of its incorporation into courses. The structure of CEAP allows for maximum creativity among faculty and extensive impact on students while requiring a minimum time commitment by either. For example, faculty can frame CEAP projects in terms of course material and needs. One freshman English composition course was entirely organized around CEAP subject matter, while most science courses include particular lab exercises. The range of types of courses and course activities related to CEAP, the differing

levels of research and engagement, the interdisciplinary nature of the work, and its relationship to the community is illustrated in the following example:

In August of 1998, a two-acre pond on Calvin's main campus experienced an unprecedented fish die-off. Within a twenty-four-hour period approximately two thousand fish expired and were left floating on the surface of the pond. Shortly thereafter unhappy neighbors called to complain of the smell and wondered what had happened to provoke such an incident. Motivated by the fish-dying event, a **biology** faculty member developed a CEAP project for a course. The work of his students led to the conclusion that the likely cause of this algal bloom was the runoff of nitrogen and phosphorus from urban fertilizers. This pond is the immediate water detention basin for storm water runoff from the surrounding neighborhood. A popular practice in this suburban community is to fertilize lawn areas in late summer, and it was surmised that unusually heavy rain events prior to the algal bloom had washed many of the lawn nutrients directly into the pond, stimulating algal growth.

This particular event and the accumulated data were presented at the CEAP Poster Session in November, and interest in the issue was heightened. The following spring, an Honors **English** 100 class became engaged in a CEAP project that focused on producing a **neighborhood** newsletter for all homeowners within the watershed that drains into these ponds. The newsletter emphasized the importance of understanding the function of watersheds, and it highlighted the incident of dead fish, along with its likely cause.

In this newsletter homeowners were encouraged to change their behavior by decreasing their lawn fertilizing applications or by using an alternative fertilizer that is recommended for yards that are adjacent to sensitive wetlands. Homeowners that emptied their swimming pools directly into the storm drains were also asked to allow their pool water to settle for a sufficient time before it is drained, thereby diminishing the amount of chlorine that may be entering the pond. As a result, several neighbors contacted Calvin before emptying pools to assure the college that they had allowed the chlorine to evaporate.

In an attempt to further address this issue, a senior **engineering** design team selected this issue as their year-long project in the fall of 1999. Four engineering students, along with a **biology** student, became fully engaged with this issue and presented the administration with a state-of-the-art storm water treatment system proposal. This design utilized a series of levees and shallow water areas planted in native vegetation to filter out potential contaminants before they reached the pond itself. The **administration** seriously considered this plan, but due mostly to space

constraints, opted for a simpler, less comprehensive storm water treatment basin. This plan led to the construction of an earthen berm that holds back the storm water runoff in a detention pond, the overflow of which leads into the larger pond itself. Although this was initially disappointing to the design team and to others involved in this issue, it did signify a positive step towards improving the water quality of the pond. During the negotiations, the administration pledged funds to create an extensive native wildflower planting on the berm. During the summer of 2000, six students worked with two CEAP professors for two weeks, re-contouring and planting this berm with over two thousand transplanted native wildflowers and grasses as well as more than twenty pounds of native plant seed. The water in this pond has become regularly monitored by an introductory honors **chemistry** lab every fall.

The planting itself was designed to facilitate future experimentation and monitoring. This particular project has attracted the attention of the **municipality** into which the water from the pond eventually flows. While not realizing the full capacity of the engineering students' original plan, this project has been cited as an example to the **broader community** of an environmentally sensitive strategy for improving water quality in the broader watershed.

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Intentional Student Communities: Project Neighborhood, Pamoja House, Our Place

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Description of the Project

Unstructured off-campus time for students is a largely untapped area of student learning and community involvement.[1] In order to effectively embed engagement into their core work, campuses must consider ways for students to participate naturally as active citizens within their geographic neighborhoods. Intentional living environments that allow for healthy exchange between students, faculty, and community residents provide an arena for the deep learning that depends on involvement and community. Campuses that are primarily residential face greater challenges here, but even these can develop ways to remind students that they are citizens of neighborhoods, towns, cities, or municipalities.

Colleges should work to inform their students of local, regional, state, national, and international issues, through regular interaction with neighbors, city leaders, and residents. This can be done naturally by exposing students to local nonprofit organizations with target issues ranging from the local to the global. For students to interact with other citizens, ranging from neighbors who are involved in the local Neighborhood Watch to local alumni who have organized Amnesty International chapters, provides students with models of engagement and lifelong citizenship.

Colleges and universities must help students to recognize that their lives are not fragmented collections of unconnected realities. Built environments, natural environments, academic, social, political, and vocational commitments are all related in meaningful ways. Providing students with resources for connecting with local residents, whether they be faculty, staff, alumni, or friends of the college who live in the vicinity of students' own residences, will help to make the connections more

[1] The following three paragraphs are adapted from my essay, "A Seamless Coat of Learning: Weaving Together Telos and Praxis through Committed Community Engagement," which was written in autumn 2006 for the 20th Anniversary Essay Collection for Campus Compact, entitled Embedding Engagement in Higher Education, and found online at www.compact.org/20th/papers.

visible and obvious. This is not a new idea in higher education, just one that has been neglected as institutions have grown and the research model has supplanted the residential faculty model of operation.

In this environment in which fragmentation and specialization in higher education have led to a loss of community, education for citizenship has become counter-intuitive for students.[2] Robert Bellah and his associates (1996), and more recently Robert Putnam (2000), have presented convincing scholarship supporting this assumption. Higher education in America has contributed to this trend by separating knowledge, skills, and virtue and by enabling students to buy into a rampant, and particularly American, societal individualism. Intentional Christian communities of learning, growing, serving, living, and worship can and do counteract this powerful force for students, staff and faculty at colleges and universities. This case study's focus is the historical context of student and faculty community involvement in American higher education but focuses on Calvin College's history and efforts toward intentional community.

The Historical Context

Around the turn of the twentieth century, faculty and students in American colleges and universities began researching the "social problem." At several universities, the study of such social problems and a concomitant interest in settlement work began as early as the 1880s (Kemeny, 1998). For example, the Jane Addams Hull House, situated in Chicago offered an environment where college students and faculty lived in poor, urban neighborhoods to study and assist the poor.

The Hull House served as a catalyst in the rapid growth of the social sciences. Addams had the ability to appeal to both old and new schools of thought in American life. R. Crunden (1982) suggested that "her [Addams] impoverished immigrants from Europe, with their needs and problems, provided the children of Anglo-Saxon middle classes with experiences otherwise unknown to them, and this occurred within a manageable setting. Hull-House cut both ways: it satisfied the amateur conscience wanting to do good and the professional need to research well" (p. 68). Becoming a general secretary of a YMCA or going to work at a settlement house became

[2] Much of the following is adapted (with permission of the authors) from the article "Connecting the Mind, Heart and Hands through Intentional Community at Calvin College," published in the *Journal of College and Character*, in June 2005.

viable career options for college men and women who wanted to combine their passion for ministry with their desire to address the problems of poverty and injustice or with their desire to foster spiritual growth in college students.

Graduating seniors from across the nation looked for ways to become involved in the evolving social reform movement as evidenced by the number of students who became involved in the settlement house movement. Between 1886 and 1911, seventeen thousand five hundred students and recent graduates, mostly from affluent families, joined Jane Addams on her urban crusade (Strauss & Howe, 1991). One graduating student from Brown University characterized the nineteenth century as one that had seen both complicated social problems as well as a "new era of sympathy," wherein people had begun to consider themselves more than ever as parts of "a great organic whole, upon whose welfare depends the prosperity of every individual." Students who committed themselves to this work would spend time with the poor, not at a distance but hand to hand and bring into the lives of those men what they most need—the inspiration of genuine sympathy and true-hearted friendship." C. S. Aldrich (1894) made the claim that by living among the poor and teaching thrift and industry, college settlement workers were also stabilizing the democracy. "The worthiness and stability of a democratic government," according to Aldrich, "must always depend upon the morality of the masses . . . Civic virtue is dependent on morality. How then can a nation prosper when the integrity of her citizens is lost?" Therefore, argued Aldrich, "the establishment of college settlements in the great nerve centers of populations marks an era of political improvement and is one of the rays of light behind the clouds which are now darkening the sunshine of our national prosperity." This creative new movement addressed social, moral, and political progress. Social obligation drove men and women into the work of settlement houses in the same way that spiritual obligation had served to call men in previous generations to lives of Christian ministry.

Fast Forward—Intentional Christian Community at Calvin College

Calvin College developed as a liberal arts college with a national reach during the years following the most intense emphasis on the social gospel, 1890-1920. Until the 1970s, the college remained almost exclusively inhabited by and in existence for the children and grandchildren of the Dutch Reformed immigrants of the Christian Reformed Church. The social upheaval of the 1960s, combined with the theological shifts of the late 1960s toward a more explicit openness and engagement with culture, conspired to begin a movement where the college began to see itself as a participant both in local issues as well as national scholarly conversations. In addition, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the college itself moved from the confines of its small, urban location to a

sprawling suburban campus to accommodate a burgeoning student body. The move enabled the college to build several large residence halls and, eventually, to purchase adjacent apartment complexes, all of which has led to its current housing configuration of approximately twenty-two hundred of four thousand students (roughly 56%) living on campus. While a worthy topic of discussion, the intentional community that is fostered in these on-campus residences is outside the boundaries of the current case study.

Living-learning communities have been a popular pedagogical idea throughout the history of American liberal arts higher education. Calvin College has been no exception to this tradition of creative pedagogy linking the college experience to the idea of various forms of community. Several efforts to enable students to learn in community, and in **a** community, over the past few decades have coalesced in a current climate of learning that transcends, unsurprisingly, the borders of formal classrooms. Rooted in the early 1970s with the establishment of a community of faculty, students, and community members known as the Worden Street Community, three more recent efforts have emerged linking students, faculty or staff, and community in a residential learning environment. These three are: Project Neighborhood, the Pamoja House, and Our Place.

Modeled after the Swiss Christian community founded by theologian and social critic Francis Schaefer, known as L'Abri ("shelter"), the Worden Street Community began in the fall of 1971 as an attempt to enable a few faculty members to develop a more "satisfying and valuable lifestyle." (see "An Experiment in Christian Living" *Calvin College Chimes*, May 12, 1972). Students were included in a living arrangement that included three faculty families and one local physician and his family. The four families purchased homes on the same urban street together and rented an additional apartment in the lower half of a fifth house. The student newspaper reporting on motives for including students noted that, "Besides giving the students an additional learning experience, the group hoped that they could get to know and understand the student psyche better." The community remained intact until the mid-1980s, when the faculty members and their families eventually left the area for academic commitments elsewhere.

The impulse for off-campus intentional Christian community seems to have lain dormant for several years after the closure of the Worden Street Community, but in the late 1990s, a resurgence of interest appeared. In 1996 Calvin began its first semester program of off-campus, international study

in Tegucigalpa, Honduras.[3] As the pool of students who had spent time in Honduras grew, a small community, known as Pamoja, (Kiswahili for "together") was founded to accommodate these students' interest in living in more intentional ways that were in line with some of the commitments made while in Honduras. The group has moved several times, but has maintained its neighborhood focus, its faculty/staff mentor couple, and its commitments to simplicity, local food, and vegetarian leanings. Meanwhile, in the fall of 1997 a conversation between the college chaplain, the Service-Learning director, and a local entrepreneur and his wife culminated in the purchase of a large, older home in the vicinity of the former urban campus. The home was intended to serve as a place where students could live in intentional community, focusing on both the internal commitments of a community of Christians to each others' well-being and also on the external commitments of a neighborhood community, the need to know and serve one's neighbors as a manifestation of one's Christian convictions. This house became known as the Koinonia House (Greek for "fellowship"), and subsequent houses were opened on the same model by the college in ensuing years. Currently the college operates the Koinonia House and two additional houses in collaboration with local church communities. The Peniel House (Greek for "face of God") is a collaboration with Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church and the Harambee House (Kiswahili for "pull together") is a collaboration with First Christian Reformed Church. The houses continue to function on the model of a balance between building internal and external community, and students who are selected to live in them are required to form a mutual covenant with each other and an adult mentor hired by the college, to spend ten hours per week in some form of community service, and to participate in a one-credit interdisciplinary course exploring the theoretical and practical elements of both internal and external community living.

More recently, since the spring of 2006, a student movement known as Our Place has arisen. The roots of this movement are found in at least two areas. First, a 2002 restructuring of student leadership opportunities created the Barnabas Team, a leadership opportunity designed to infuse the wisdom and maturity of third- and fourth-year students back into the residence halls environment where first- and second-year students typically live. The position acknowledged the existence of two campuses, the on-campus campus, and the off-campus campus, and attempted to create more intentional bridges between the two. A later result was the creation of an off-campus intern

[3] The college had been sending students abroad for many years to Spain and other international locations, but Honduras was the first program to hire a Calvin faculty member to reside in-country and run a program. The Honduras program offers a concentration in Spanish each fall and a concentration in international development each spring.

Barnabas position, designed to better understand where off-campus students were living and how to better connect the two campuses. The other root is an interdisciplinary course taught in fall 2005 and spring 2006 on the history and sociology of student activism—several students from this course joined with others in the making of the Our Place movement. Our Place has been an attempt to explicitly link college faculty and administrators with students, in student homes, to talk about ways to live in intentional Christian community. Events ranging from regular Saturday morning pancake breakfasts, to gatherings at the homes of influential administrators like the provost or the vice-president for Student Life, have enabled a rich conversation to animate both students and staff.

Finally, as a result of Pamoja, Project Neighborhood, and Our Place, several other more organic housing communities have emerged, and the college is responding in multiple ways, through both curricular and co-curricular means, and through staff and faculty, to meet the needs of this movement toward the connection between living and learning commitments.

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CALVIN

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Celebrating Liberal Arts and Place: Embrace Our Place Festival

During the week of April 16-23, Calvin hosted the first Embrace Our Place Festival, a week-long celebration to commemorate the college's connection to and partnership with our community, city, and region. Embrace Our Place included a variety of events both on and off campus and began with an urban bike tour and opening reception downtown at the Calvin-owned Center Art Gallery. Delicious food from many local restaurants was served, local businesses showcased their wares, and then an opening program was held at the Ladies Literary Club (a building recently acquired by Calvin, right around the corner from the art gallery) which featured a presentation by a city commissioner on the important relationship between the college and the city.

Other events during the week included an Engaged Scholars Showcase highlighting faculty and student research across many disciplines on issues of local importance and featuring brief research presentations from faculty in all academic divisions of the college.

On Friday and Saturday, April 20 and 21 the tenth anniversary of the Calvin Environmental Assessment Program (CEAP) was celebrated at the Bunker Interpretive Center, and findings were displayed from campus environmental research conducted since 1997.

See Appendix E and F for two booklets developed to showcase the many ways our academic mission of teaching, learning, research, and scholarship is fulfilled within our place.

On Monday, April 23, the Embrace Our Place Festival concluded with a Community Partnerships celebration which recognized the collaborative work accomplished between many Grand Rapids Community organizations and Calvin faculty and students.

See Appendix G for a complete schedule of activities for the Embrace Our Place Festival.

Embrace Our Place grew out of a larger research project funded by the Teagle Foundation which has made it possible for Calvin to explore ways to strengthen liberal arts education by focusing on our place. A growing body of literature affirms the need for place-based educational initiatives. Through interviews with faculty, upper-level students, alumni, and community leaders this research is examining the college/community connections and how a focus on the particulars of our place can strengthen liberal arts education.

Lessons Learned and Recommendations

As this white paper describes, this project at Calvin has been large and multidimensional. We have learned multiple lessons—both theoretical and practical—over the course of the project. Here we summarize some of the lessons learned for our own practice, lessons that we believe are transferable to other liberal arts colleges.

Some lessons learned:

- Trajectory matters. The place-based education described here has been supported by a long trajectory of community involvement by alumni, students, faculty and staff. Student volunteer work led to service-learning, which led to deeper academic engagement and faculty research involvement. The Teagle grant project allowed us the opportunity to look at the state of our current involvement and to understand our involvement in terms of a theory of place-based education. We have found this theory to offer a deep well of resources for understanding both our scholarly and our educational work. But we would not be at this point without a strong tradition of community connection, defined, not as strictly social service but as academic inquiry.

- College mission and identity matter. Calvin College is a place where ideas and theory are vital. Even our professional programs contain a strong emphasis on the liberal arts. It is not hard to convince faculty and students that big ideas matter in the conduct of civic life because we teach our students in almost every course that underlying worldview assumptions influence practice. Through this project we have been able to show students how practices, in turn, affect worldview.

- Local and global are intertwined. Calvin is known for its global interests and initiatives, and at times both students and faculty have noted that the global message and focus has taken them away from local interests. But we have found that strong local involvement around specific issues (e.g., water quality, food networks) has prepared students to better appreciate local concerns in their off campus programs. And many issues identified as important locally, for example, food production, race and immigration, water quality, have global connections.

- "Place" is a rich metaphor and grounding reality for fostering interdisciplinary collaborative work. Faculty value collaborative work that honors their disciplinary resources, expands their imaginations, unleashes their creative capacity, and celebrates their work together. We have found that this central theme has resonated with other divisions of the college as well. For example, student life and financial services have changed practices based on the conversations about place related to this grant initiative.

- Developing interdisciplinary teams around central issues related to place has proved to be an effective faculty development strategy. For example, work being done on watershed issues or the urban-rural connection has helped faculty new to the community to identify strategic initiatives for their scholarship and has helped move some faculty into strong local networks that have a stake in their success.

- "Place" is a valuable tool for building partnerships with other colleges and institutions in the community. External networks have been built around specific local issues (for example, childhood lead poisoning), and as the college becomes a part of those networks, those networks come to value the perspective of the liberal arts.

- Assessment of student learning is important. We chose to do qualitative interviewing for our assessment of students, and we found that this assessment/interview process served to focus student attention on the process and result of their education in relation to place. The results of this student-learning assessment have inspired faculty to make changes in teaching.

- The power of ritual to shape campus commitments is significant. We have found that a yearly celebration of our campus partnerships and community-based research has served to galvanize faculty, student, alumni, and community interest in our academic commitment to our locale. Every year there are more partnerships and more research to celebrate. In the past we have had an afternoon of celebration; this past year we celebrated with a week of Embrace Our Place activities.

Recommendations:

- Our exploration of place, both this specific place and the abstract concept of place, will continue far beyond the period of the Teagle grant because it has become an important part of our understanding of our role in the city. We offer these recommendations for our continuing practice with the hope that they are generalizable to other liberal arts colleges:

- An Office of Academic Community Engagement, located in the Provost's Office, has been essential to this work. Linking faculty with external networks, gathering faculty, staff, students, and community members together to foster scholarly work around local issues, helping groups of faculty do strategic scholarship planning, and so on, are all resource-intensive projects and profit from central coordination.

- The strategic planning initiatives that have been taking place throughout the institution on the college- and department-level will include greater explicit attention to and planning for the ways that place informs our efforts at the college.

- The cultivation of community partners remains a vital part of both educational and scholarly work in the community. We do our best work when we are working on research questions defined, at least in part, by community members and when our educational efforts on behalf of students demonstrate genuine partnership with regional residents. We need to call each other to accountability in this area—it is too easy to lose this emphasis on partnership.

- If we want to influence both student and community thinking about the importance of the liberal arts, we must use care to connect our place-based work to the particular liberal arts mission of the college. In both our internal and external communications, we should make the links explicit between liberal arts questions and methods and matters of concern to our community.

- The Office of Academic Community Engagement should continue its sponsorship of a yearly bus tour for new faculty and invite new faculty from area colleges as well. This topically oriented tour is designed to invite new faculty into scholarly networks focused on particular city issues and to foster opportunities for collaborative research among and between faculty and community partners.

- The Office of Academic Community Engagement should continue to foster interdisciplinary reading groups, speakers, and faculty research focused on community issues and opportunities.

- The Office of Academic Community Engagement should continue its yearly celebration of place-based scholarship. We should explore making this a regional celebration, with invitations to other regional liberal arts colleges.

- We should strengthen our ties with both alumni groups and other community groups involved in local issues and continue to move more faculty (rather than primarily administrators) into collaborative relationships with these groups.

- The recent staff development day that was held within the Student Life Division (including city walks and an experiential introduction to city issues) should be expanded for all administrative divisions of the college. One way to promote this is to keep senior leadership of the college directly involved in conversations about place.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A Summary Points of the Faculty Interviews

Key Theme: Different disciplinary perspectives lead liberal arts faculty to view and interpret place in very diverse ways

- Human community/land/resources/power
- Separate *from* or part *of* the place (charity vs. inhabitation)
- Abstract vs. particular—cyclic movement from the particular to the abstract and then back to the particular

Key Theme: Inherent tensions pose challenges for faculty

- Placelessness vs. place-based
- Global vs. local focus
- Professional demands: time, attention, focus

Key Theme: An emphasis on place offers opportunities to enlarge the scholarly imagination

- Paradigmatic and epistemological shifts
- Intertextuality
- Interdisciplinarity

Appendix B Summary Points of the Student Interviews

Key Theme: Liberal arts curriculum plays a formative role

- De-centering of the self through the teaching of universal concepts
- Integrative nature of learning
- Big picture understanding

Key Theme: Place-based pedagogical strategies build an ethic of care

- Academically based service-learning
- Using the local place as a teaching tool
- Sustained off-campus study

Key Theme: Experience beyond the classroom fosters important connections, both to place and to people

- Faculty influence
- Church/work/prior life experience
- Choice of student living situation

Appendix C Summary Points of the Alumni Interviews

Key Theme: Liberal arts education offers unique benefits which can foster a sense of place

- Broad vision, able to see connections, integrative nature of reality
- Learn how to learn, become lifelong learners
- Broad impact of the core curriculum—understanding with a purpose
- Clear purpose tied to a sense of responsibility and social change
- Connection between worldview/beliefs *and* living/doing/being in the world
- Significant faculty influence
- Dispersed and active in all kinds of sectors of the city/region

Key Theme: Liberal arts colleges, such as Calvin College, face certain barriers or limitations in relation to place

- Physical, geographical isolation of the campus
- Not seen as a serious stakeholder in the community
- Transient nature of college life
- Poor at partnership and collaboration
- College ethnic and religious identity—sometimes a conversation stopper
- Reputation—intolerant to difference
- Perceptions of elitism
- Connection to the city is often based on charity perceptions
- Low visibility within city

Key Theme: Liberal arts colleges face particular opportunities for future growth and development within their place

- Build awareness of how the city enriches the college
- Develop a physical presence downtown
- Do a better job of being in the public square
- Make strategic long-term commitments and become better collaborators
- Contribute to the regional economy through academic resources
- Connect with immediate neighborhood
- House students in neighborhoods
- Find ways to be a presence

Appendix D Summary Points of the City/ Community Leaders' Interviews

Key theme: Liberal arts education is foundational in preparing leaders for their future vocational work

- Liberal arts students—more inquisitive, more curious, develop critical thinking skills, learn how to learn.
- Being able to see issues from multiple perspectives and to facilitate dialogue about controversial issues.
- Focus on becoming involved—the issue is less important than learning how to be involved—that is the transferable skill.
- Learning that YOU can impact change and learning how to create social change in a particular place.
- Value of experiential education was highlighted.
- There is a payback, too—getting students involved, learning about community, getting personal experiences, breaking down stereotypes.

Key theme: Faculty members can play a critical role as resource people for a community and as models for students

- Growing awareness among faculty of their place and their involvement in the community.
- Faculty can be a important resource to impact a community.
- These leaders advocated for the key role faculty members play in modeling community engagement for their students.
- Need to help students learn the transition from student to professional and still stay connected to a community.

Key theme: Liberal arts colleges could be a strategic partner in a community

- When strategic alliances are being formed to address the critical issues the city is facing, liberal arts colleges are not always thought of as having a contribution to make, and they are often not invited to the table.
- Colleges need to be both responsive when asked to contribute to particular needs and also to take the initiative and provide leadership on some issues.
- Collaboration is very important but difficult to accomplish.

Appendix E Academic Engaged Scholarship Booklet

Please see http://www.calvin.edu/admin/provost/engagement/teagle/pdf/AESbooklet.pdf

Appendix F Calvin Environmental Assessment Program (CEAP) Booklet

Please see http://www.calvin.edu/admin/provost/engagement/teagle/pdf/CEAPbooklet.pdf

Appendix G Embrace Our Place Schedule of Activities

Please see http://www.calvin.edu/admin/provost/engagement/teagle/pdf/EOPevents.pdf