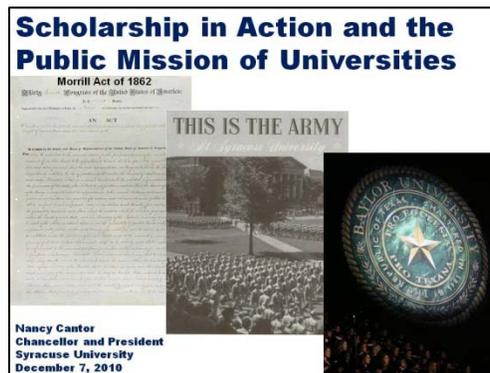


Scholarship in Action And the Public Mission of Universities

Nancy Cantor
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At key points in our nation's history, we've turned to our colleges and universities to serve as engines for prosperity and agents of social mobility. This is such a moment. Times are hard, and we are called to help revive our economy and sustain our communities while opening our doors even wider to a whole generation of talented youth: the fast-growing population of students who will be the first in their families to go to college, the sons and daughters of newly immigrated families, veterans returning from post 9/11 conflicts, and the students who are now in often under-resourced inner-city and rural schools. We must find ways to welcome them to our ranks.

The challenge, as I would frame it, is to engage our students and faculty and staffs in creative work that is tuned to the world's most pressing issues as we as institutions become more innovative, effective, and valuable, as we become vital contributors to a newly thriving America. At the same time---to draw on the wise words of our neighbors in Syracuse, the Onondaga Nation---we must be ever vigilant for the well-being of the "seventh generation yet to come."

History shows that higher education can do this. Nearly 150 years ago, between the years Baylor and Syracuse were founded, when the Civil War threatened the very existence of our nation, we were challenged to tap the productivity of our land and the promise of the Industrial Age. President Lincoln had the foresight to see beyond the conflict and sign into law the Morrill Act---the landmark legislation creating our land-grant university system to conserve, encourage,

¹ Speech given at Baylor University, December 7, 2010, as part of the Presidential Inaugural Lecture Series.

and promote agriculture, which employed more than half the nation's population and deeply influenced its prosperity.²

Today, in many respects, we are again in such an era. This time, we are making a transition from an industrial to a knowledge economy. Once again, our nation and our world are challenged by conflict and divisions. In our so-called flat, fully-wired and interconnected world--where nearly 70% of Americans live in Metropolitan areas---there are thousands who are not connected at all, who are falling farther and farther behind in education, income, and employment.³ Simultaneously, the after-effects of industry and over consumption have given warning that our natural resources are fast becoming depleted. The sustainability of our water, energy, food, and land ---all absolutely critical for our survival on this planet--- unfortunately have also become issues that have pitted whole groups, cultures, and religions against one another, as if we've forgotten how to raise a barn together!

Against this fraught backdrop---and with an eye on that seventh generation yet to come--- it's imperative that great institutions roll up their sleeves and get to the world's work. If not, we should rightly be criticized for breaking our social compact, whether we are public or private, religiously-affiliated or not. As your new President, Ken Starr, wrote recently in the journal *First Things*: "All too often, the modern academy appears as something smugly remote and arrogantly aloof from the people who support and sustain it."⁴ We cannot afford, nor should we want, to be tarred with that description. And in very deep ways, it would be inconsistent with the legacies of commitment to public engagement at both of our institutions.

In the case of Syracuse, for example, World War II was a defining moment for our institutional identity. Overnight, we literally tripled our enrollment to welcome returning veterans on the GI Bill. Today we still proudly embrace our veterans and support their road to opportunity, breaking new ground with our award-winning Entrepreneurs Bootcamp for Veterans with Disabilities that has expanded to include five other universities, from Connecticut to California.

Baylor's touchstone is ensclosed in your motto -- "*Pro Ecclesia*" followed by "*Pro Texana*." Your passionate embrace of faith serves as a motivator for public service, a tradition with roots in your very founding. It is a living legacy, as expressed by the desires of "nearly one-third of first-year Baylor students to pursue careers in health care," as President Starr proudly described in his essay on "*The Soul of a College*."

² Hilgard, E.W. (1882, April). Progress in agriculture by education and government aid. *The Atlantic Monthly*, 49(294), 581-541, online at cdl.library.cornell.edu/cgi-bin/moa/pageviewer?coll=moa&root=/moa/atla/atla0049/&tif=00537.TIF&view=50&frames=1.

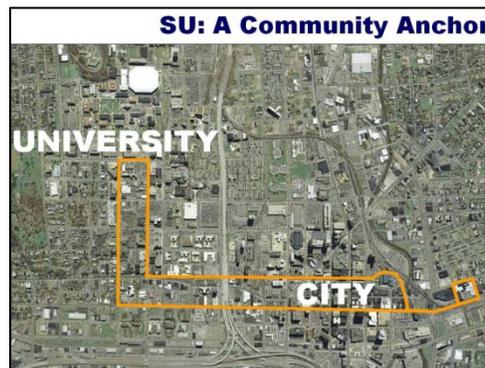
³ See Brookings Institution analysis of "Population of Counties by Decennial Census: 1900 to 1990" (U.S. Census Bureau) and Population Estimates Program data, p. 17, and Elizabeth Kneebone and Emily Garr, "Income and Poverty," pp. 132-143, in *State of Metropolitan America: On the Front Lines of Demographic Transformation* a 2010 report by The Brookings Institution, 17, available online at <http://www.brookings.edu/metro/stateofmetroamerica.aspx> accessed 23 November 2010.

⁴ Ken Starr, *The Soul of a College*, *First Things*, November 2010, 62-64.

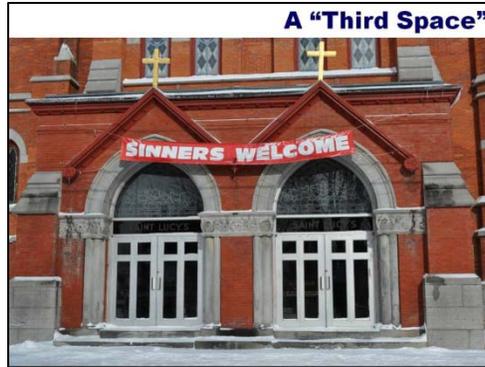
Syracuse and Baylor are both private research universities that are acutely aware of their responsibility to serve the public good. A modern research university can and should go beyond its boundaries to tackle the “messy” intractable problems that are best addressed through many disciplines with many partners, on campus and off. Education, side by side with research embedded in our rich array of academic disciplines, can make a huge impact in partnerships of all kinds with our many communities.

The Third Spaces of Public Engagement

In Syracuse, where the city’s population has been moving to the suburbs for the last 50 years, Syracuse University is a critical anchor institution in turning our community around. We see quite directly how important the public mission of higher education can be to a prosperous future. We are deeply engaged with local issues that resonate globally, from environmental sustainability to urban education, working with many partners and creating “third spaces” of interaction built around major projects that engage faculty and students by intertwining learning, scholarship, and civic engagement. We call this vision Scholarship in Action.



One such “third space” is our city’s Near Westside, with its iconic centerpiece, *St. Lucy’s Church*, welcoming all, sinners and saints alike, to this beleaguered but deeply soulful neighborhood. This was once a thriving district of factories, rail yards, and housing where people could walk to work----one factory had more than 2000 employees and not one place to park! It was one of the neighborhoods hardest hit during the city’s industrial decline. The Near Westside now includes the second poorest cluster of census tracts in the nation. It’s a multi-ethnic and multi-racial community with enormous human potential, despite the profound challenges that arise from the deep chasms that divide our society and our world. On the Near Westside, 50% of the 3,300 residents live below the poverty level, 40% are unemployed, and 37% consider themselves to have one or more disabilities.



Over the years, as housing vacancies went up and property values went down, the dilapidated properties in this neighborhood were snapped up by slumlords, who collected the rents but rarely made repairs. Many of them live out of town, where they don't have to see the landscape they have made: 152 vacant parcels of land and 83 vacant structures in an area of less than a third of a square mile.

Several years ago, SU joined with foundations, businesses, not-for-profits, state and city governments, and, most importantly, neighborhood residents from grandmothers with the wisdom of the ages to the deeply committed priest of *St. Lucy's* to the youth who will ultimately save this neighborhood. Together they created a nonprofit organization—the Near Westside Initiative—as an exciting and (we hope) deeply democratic partnership that embeds the arts, technology and design with other fields—architecture, entrepreneurship, law, education, environmental engineering, public health and public communications to name a few—as catalysts for change, of the kind our design students imagined when they positioned a child of the community drawing her own future on the side of an old warehouse.



The Near Westside Initiative is helping to draw that future, and not by seeking to gentrify the neighborhood—which ultimately merely sweeps problems under the rug—but by transforming the neighborhood from the inside out with the community's residents at the table. And we have multiple nonprofit partners who have long worked with residents to address housing issues piece by piece. Their collective action, connected to the efforts of many others, is producing results that have truly transformative potential.

Home HeadQuarters, a not-for-profit organization, has acquired 103 residential parcels within the target area and to date has rehabilitated 13 properties, constructed seven new green residences on vacant properties, and marketed and sold five vacant, dilapidated properties for one dollar each to new homeowners. Christopher Community has built 60 new affordable rental properties, and Habitat for Humanity has constructed nine new homes since the Initiative began.

For our part, SU is leveraging some longstanding strengths to make residential and commercial buildings in the neighborhood more sustainable. For example, our School of Architecture teamed up with our green technologists to conduct an international competition to create cutting-edge, green, single-family homes designed specifically for sites on the Near Westside. Three of the winning designs have been constructed and are near completion. Even in our frigid, snowy winters, one of these homes is so well insulated it can be heated with the energy it would take to run a hair dryer!



All told, since the inception of the Near Westside Initiative, the neighborhood has seen more than \$12 million in residential property acquisition, rehabilitation, and new construction, providing families housing options that are safe and affordable—and energy-efficient, which is no small thing in our climate!

These efforts have stimulated very encouraging economic activity. Two of the warehouses being redeveloped are drawing artists and arts-based businesses and nonprofits to the neighborhood, including ProLiteracy, the world's largest literacy organization, with 135 employees, and our regional public television affiliate, WCNY, with 80 employees. New York State's oldest architectural firm, a bookstore, a recording studio, a coffee shop, a fitness center, and a bakery have all been attracted to the neighborhood over the past two years.



To create wealth that is rooted in the neighborhood, two resident-owned cooperatives are being launched: a high-tech hydroponic greenhouse that will grow and sell fresh vegetables and a “Green Property Management Company,” to maintain nearly 300,000 square feet of mixed-use properties owned and operated by the Near Westside Initiative. These properties are both commercial and residential, and the new co-op will use environmentally sound practices and products to keep them up.

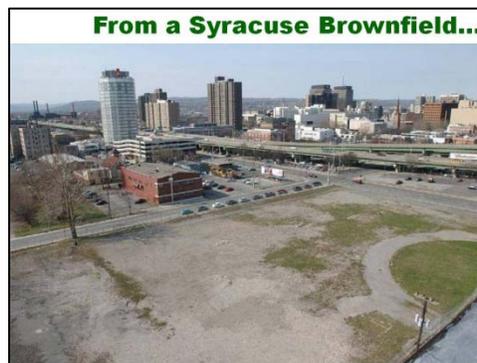
At this point, you might well say, “That’s great for the city, the neighborhood, and the residents, but it sounds a lot like the traditional economic development that universities have long sought for their communities. What does it do for higher education at the university?”

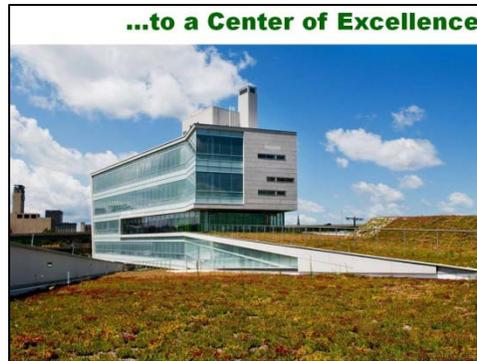
Well, the answer is: “a lot.”

“Third spaces” like the Near Westside give our faculty and our students unparalleled opportunities for cutting edge research and for creativity that really matters. Scholarship in Action is, in fact, a two-way street of reciprocal engagement that traverses our campus and community.

Collaborative “Laboratories” for Scholarship in Action

To give you one example: the green technologists involved in the neighborhood are from the Syracuse Center of Excellence in Environmental and Energy Systems. Syracuse University hosts this Center, but its assets are distributed among 12 core universities and research institutes, industry partners across our region, and government agencies at all levels. All of them have a “second home” (and for some a “first home”) in the new state-of-the-art facility recently erected for the Center on a remediated brownfield site in downtown Syracuse. Many years ago, it was the site of the Smith Typewriter Company---before it became Smith Corona, producing the typewriters that were a staple of every business office until computers made them obsolete.





The regional, federation approach to environmental issues that the Center of Excellence is taking allows us to assemble entrepreneurial, agile, cross-sector, cross-disciplinary teams to take on sustainability problems wherever they arise. We find ourselves breaking down academic and organizational silos both through necessity and the interests of our partners, because solving complex environmental problems demands this kind of broad collaboration. Crucially, this opens up the process for setting the research agenda and for integrating the perspectives and interests of public, private, and nonprofit partners.



In partnership with the Near Westside Initiative, the Center of Excellence has an extraordinary real-world test bed for energy-efficient building innovations at every stage: from research and development to demonstration, commercialization, and deployment. For example, we've conducted a federally funded study that documents the impact of poor housing conditions locally on childhood asthma incidence. We've also funded research that has resulted in the development of air purification systems that dramatically reduce childhood asthma.

The Center worked with US GreenBuild to prototype what a whole neighborhood LEED certification system could look like, including a green retrofit plan for housing. It also is working in a partnership with the EPA, the local utility National Grid, and Home HeadQuarters to conduct free energy audits of existing businesses and homes. The goal is to identify affordable energy-efficiency upgrades for commercial and residential buildings and then help owners apply for the financing to get them done.

We've also overseen the complete, green renovation of a four-story warehouse that includes a geothermal field, solar panels, hot water on-demand, and an innovative living wall screen over part of the building, as well as rain water recycling capacity.

In fact, we're now leading an effort to scale up the impact of this kind of cross-sector collaboration across New York State, drawing in numerous other partners connected all along the "value chain" of energy-efficient building systems. We intend to form a massive New York Energy Regional Innovation Cluster that can unite the R&D and manufacturing capacities located in Upstate New York with one of the world's largest real estate markets, Downstate New York, including New York City.

So you can see why our scientists, engineers, architects, designers, real estate economists, and public policy experts are excited about the incredibly fertile ground for research—the "collaborative laboratory"—that we're cultivating. And it has all started right in our neighborhood with our many partners, where our faculty can see that the work they're doing locally in Syracuse resonates powerfully both within their academic fields and across communities around the world.

Education for the World, in the World

At research universities like Baylor and Syracuse, where we have worked hard to integrate excellent research with superb teaching, we know we must seize every opportunity to bring students into our laboratories on campus. Likewise, it is absolutely essential to realize that the laboratories we have created with our community partners also constitute optimal learning environments for our students, where they can prepare *for* the world, *in* the world.



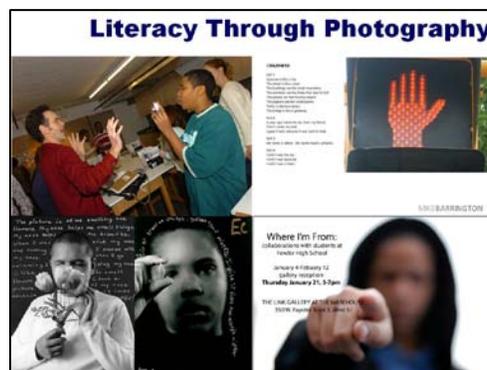
As you might imagine, the opportunities for teaching, learning, and research that we find in community contexts like the Near Westside extend across the full range of disciplines and take many forms. Professor Marion Wilson, a sculptor who is director of community initiatives in our School of Education, has been using the Near Westside as a studio for what she calls "social sculpture," named after the concept put forward by Josef Beuys, that sculpture is not only object making - but can also be thought, experience and how we mold and shape the world.

With a cross-disciplinary team of faculty and students from the arts, humanities, education, ecology, and business management, Professor Wilson is spearheading a project to transform a former drug house across the street from an elementary school from a menace to a

promise. The two-story house was stripped down to the studs and then is being re-imagined and rebuilt with recycled materials by an academically diverse team over a period of three semesters, an effort that requires both community support and planning permission from city officials.

As Professor Wilson told the zoning officials, the work at 601 Tully will “make it less of an object than a living thing that changes the way we live.” That change started with the zoning meeting itself, which was jammed by so many students, faculty members, and community partners, including a high school student who gave a long and impassioned speech in favor of the project, that the chair was moved to remark: “We’re not used to having this big a crowd. We hope you enjoy yourselves.”

The structure at 601 Tully Street will feature a center for arts education, a place where faculty member and photographer Steve Mahan, can teach both SU students and high school students together in his pioneering course on Photography and Literacy. As he says, “We’re going in and using photography as a story-telling device.” “You can tell a story without being able to read on a certain level or write on a certain level. English doesn’t have to be your first language. You might have Asperger’s, autism, a learning disability, whatever you want to call it. Instantly, right off the bat, the camera seems to level that playing field.”



For Syracuse University students, courses like these taught in community and with students from the City schools, become an eye-opening opportunity to be both expert and novice, teacher and learner, all in one experience, as they and their school district “peers” each find their vision and voice. The plan is for 601 Tully to house a coffee shop and bookstore run by students from the business academy at nearby Fowler High School, so this piece of social sculpture will also become a place to cultivate entrepreneurs.

In a parallel project, one of our communications design classes spent the entire spring semester last year creating designs---from banners on the street to maps for visitors---to help the community visually mark the identity of the Near Westside neighborhood closest to the school and to downtown as the SALT District, the Syracuse Art Literacy and Technology District.

Our students, many of them from the suburbs, became fascinated by the large number of ugly fences they saw here, some of them enclosing large empty lots for no purpose that was obvious to anyone. “What does a fence mean?” they asked each other. Would it be possible to make fences like these beautiful rather than intimidating?



They researched and proposed a number of designs, and last summer one of the students, Stephanie Hart, a junior from Keene, New Hampshire, spent the whole summer working on it as an intern without pay. She consulted with community groups on the design and then worked with local children and youth to snap 6,000 colored pieces of plastic into 11 sections of the six foot Anchor fence around Skiddy Park, the playground on the other side of Tully Street from the elementary school.

Each day, she walked over to the park from downtown with a cart, carrying 50 pound boxes of diamond-shaped plastic inserts small enough to snap into the openings in the fence. As the design progressed---some of it changed by the kids who wanted to add things like flowers---a few passersby told Stephanie they thought the pieces would be popped out again before morning, but residents of the community liked it, and over the months, the design on the fence has survived.

"I'm definitely more comfortable in the neighborhood," Stephanie said as the work went on. "I have a lot more connections than I did before the summer started. I have an idea of what it takes to do community work: how many people you have to talk to before you get things approved, how much money things cost, and how much money we *don't* have to do those things."

Growing Entrepreneurship from the Ground Up

And speaking of resources, these experiences on the Near Westside translate into critical lessons about entrepreneurship – for students, faculty, and neighborhood residents alike. Seemingly simple interactions can spark insights into what it takes to grow entrepreneurship in our city and in others, like us, that are remaking themselves to compete in what Bruce Katz, head of the Brookings Institution's Metropolitan Policy Program, refers to as "The Next Economy"—one in which America must become low-carbon and, once again, innovation driven and export oriented. If we're going to thrive in that economy, we need to grow a lot more entrepreneurs in our metropolitan areas.



As part of this effort, we've created a business incubator in the center of Syracuse's long underserved South Side. Our South Side Innovation Center provides office space and business support for start up businesses and budding entrepreneurs, sharing common costs and equipment to reduce the expenses incurred in starting new businesses.

We're helping entrepreneurs forge links with one another—through the recently incorporated South Side Entrepreneurs Association, for example. We're connecting them with resources for their businesses: investors, talent, customers, and markets. We're also introducing them to the nonprofits, public sector organizations and social service agencies geared toward building an entrepreneurial culture. SU has put its intellectual capital on the table through faculty-run educational programs and student consulting teams that help entrepreneurs who are already up and running hone their business plans.

We're starting to see incredibly promising results. In just three years, the Innovation Center has touched thousands of people through conferences and training programs. It has launched 77 new businesses and helped more than 550 existing businesses better tune their operations to their markets. It has created 72 local jobs and retained another 133.

One of the latest success stories is that of the East Environmental Group, LLC, a local, minority-owned business founded by Shawan East. They specialize in the abatement of hazardous air and building materials. From one employee, they've already grown to five, bought two other companies, and opened a second office in Binghamton, another city in Upstate New York .

Another new company, Blue Tree Studios, owned by local resident Christiana Kaiser, specializes in West African imports and foods that are now stocked by 50 stores. She too has now opened up a second office.

The South Side Innovation Center also includes a Community Test Kitchen to help local food entrepreneurs. One of these, Stacey VanWaldick, hit the road to stardom with her business Promise Me Chocolate that makes edible gems from chocolate. Her chocolates made Oprah's "O List" for 2009 holiday season and were featured by *Martha Stewart Weddings* magazine.

We're also taking these successes in the community back to campus along the two-way street of Scholarship in Action because we know we have a lot to learn about cultivating our own

entrepreneurs—and with an entrepreneurship program as strong as you have here at Baylor, you know exactly what I mean.

We're doing this through a University-wide program to infuse the entrepreneurial spirit across the curriculum—and this is entrepreneurship writ large. Extending beyond traditional notions of honing one's business acumen, we are empowering faculty, students, and professionals of all stripes to activate their intellectual capital, share it generously with others, collaborate with communities of experts, and make a difference in the world by launching new ventures specifically in our city and region.



This “E-nitiative,” as we call it, is leveraged by a five-year, \$3 million grant from the Kauffman Foundation to pool expertise across six public and private institutions, businesses, and nonprofits in Central New York. The goal is to use the experience of successful venture capitalists and entrepreneurs to mentor the next generation.

So far, the results are promising. Over the first three years, we've supported more than 150 projects. We've more than tripled enrollment in entrepreneurship courses across our partner institutions--- from 1,900 to 6,600. And our “Student Sandbox” business incubator is bursting at the seams with 15 student startups in residence right now.

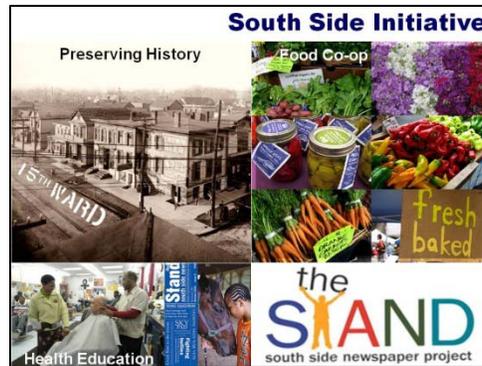
One of these is called *brand-yourself.com*. It empowers subscribers to manage the many and sometimes unwieldy aspects their online presence—a tool that we found so practical for newly minted college graduates that we gave subscriptions as a graduation gift to our entire Class of 2010. We feel it will be invaluable as they enter a job market where the virtual and physical worlds increasingly intersect.

Building Social Capital

Our expansive vision of entrepreneurship encompasses more than the business community. The idea is to reinforce and help sustain the tremendous *social* capital in the community through entrepreneurship. You can already see the progress on the South Side. As we were building the physical infrastructure for economic entrepreneurship, we were facilitating the emergence of an independent, community-based organization of neighborhood leaders.

We asked this group, the South Side Community Coalition, to identify and prioritize projects they consider essential to turning the neighborhood around. We also asked them to

suggest a social infrastructure that can sustain economic development and community-wide revitalization. The Coalition compiled a formal Request for Proposals to the Syracuse University faculty to take on their highest priority projects. We, in turn, identified faculty members and students with the right expertise to partner with community members in these efforts.



As a result, the variety of projects now underway speaks both to the Coalition's thoughtful and visionary leadership and to the breadth of interest among SU's faculty to share what they know with—and learn from—the local community.

For example, access to affordable, fresh produce, has long has been an issue in this neighborhood that major chain grocery stores have utterly avoided. Our own scholarship over the years has shown that poor nutrition---the result of buying food from small corner stores that stock mostly liquor, lottery tickets, and no fresh vegetables or fruit---has been a key factor in high rates of infant mortality.⁵

The South Side Community Coalition and Syracuse faculty have now collaborated to sponsor a farmers' market held seasonally in a centrally located parking lot in the heart of the South Side. Plans are in place for a permanent home for a locally owned Food Co-op.

We have been involved in health initiatives in this community for several years through the award-winning Genesis Health Project Network, a community-designed and culturally-sensitive collaboration with the pastors and congregations of ten inner-city Black churches with more than 3000 members. Working with lay health advocates and local medical institutions, the Genesis Network meets residents where they live – for example, at barbershops and in churches – and provides education to reduce health disparities, obesity, and to promote healthy lifestyle among African Americans in low income areas of the city.⁶

⁵ In the 1980s, Syracuse led U.S. cities in African American infant deaths. Even now, infants of color die at more than twice the rate of white babies. See the work of medical anthropologist and SU Professor Sandra D. Lane, *Why are our babies dying:: pregnancy, birth, and death in America* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2008) for an analysis of structural violence against our most vulnerable citizens.

⁶ For a recent description of the Genesis project, the work of Luvenia Cowart, a Syracuse University professor and nurse, see James T. Mulder, "Customers get health check and haircut at Syracuse barber shop," *The Post-Standard* (20 November 2010), online at http://blog.syracuse.com/news/print.html?entry=/2010/11/customers_get_health_check_and.html

Preserving the histories of families and social institutions also was identified as a key concern by neighborhood residents, so we've assembled a team of SU faculty and students spanning library science, museum studies, and communication and rhetorical studies to train residents to preserve cultural artifacts.

Together, they created a documentary film about the history of the neighborhood, which was and is predominantly African American, and we established a mechanism for training future generations to preserve their past—our present—creating a certificate program in the preservation of cultural heritage.

And, as we know, the news coming out of historically disempowered neighborhoods like the South Side is too often told from the perspective of people on the outside. So we're empowering the insiders—the residents—to report *their* news from *their* perspective, as faculty and students from our Newhouse School of Public Communications have partnered with residents to create a print and online community newspaper called *The Stand*.

Educating our Children

Speaking of the news, as we're all aware, the state of urban schools has not been encouraging. Nationally, we see growing gaps in educational attainment between the public schools in our cities and our suburbs. High school students from low-income families are dropping out of school at six times the rate of high-income peers. The math achievement of African- and Latino- American 17-year-olds is trailing that of white students, and many bright but poor children are not receiving the encouragement and advice they need to pursue college.⁷

We have seen these trends play out locally in Syracuse, where 71 % of Syracuse City School District students are from minority groups,⁸ 75% receive free or reduced-price lunches, and less than 50% of the students entering kindergarten graduate high school 13 years later.

Knowing that the hope of our city—indeed, the hope of cities like it all over America—rests on our ability to dramatically alter this picture, Syracuse University and the City School District have undertaken a precedent-setting project in partnership with the Say Yes to Education Foundation. Together, we aim to alter the life course of students throughout our city by dramatically increasing the rate at which they attend college.

⁷ See the statement by The Education Trust on 12th-Grade Reading and Mathematics Results from the 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress available online at <http://www.edtrust.org/dc/press-room/press-release/statement-of-the-education-trust-on-12th-grade-reading-and-mathematics-r>. Also Sarah Almy and Christina Theokas, *Not Prepared for Class: High-Poverty Schools Continue to have Fewer in-Field Teachers*, The Education Trust, November 2010, online at <http://www.edtrust.org/dc/publication/not-prepared-for-class-high-poverty-schools-continue-to-have-fewer-in-field-teachers>

⁸ Syracuse City School District, District Demographics and Profile, online at <http://www.syracusecityschools.com/?q=node/828> accessed 20 November 2010.



Building on the Foundation’s track record of remarkable success in several urban schools in Harlem, Philadelphia, Hartford, Connecticut, and Cambridge, Massachusetts, we are scaling up the Say Yes model for the first time to the level of an entire district.

We emphasize that the persistent and well-documented “achievement gap” between urban students and their suburban peers is *not* an accurate measure of ability or potential, but is actually an “opportunity” gap. Too many urban students have not had the *opportunity* to take full advantage of the academic and social supports that their more privileged peers have, experiences that lead to success in higher education. This gap shows up not only in grades, but also in standardized-test scores, course selection, dropout rates, access to curriculum and quality instruction. We see the results in high school graduation rates and the differentials in college admission and college-completion rates.

Say Yes to Education: Syracuse closes the opportunity gap by providing crucial, comprehensive support to the 21,000 students in the city’s public schools and their families. We are addressing many of the academic, health, social, emotional, and legal issues that so often act as insurmountable road blocks to inner-city youth on the path to college.

Perhaps most importantly, it helps students to overcome one of the biggest barriers of all: the cost of higher education. Through the Say Yes Higher Education Compact, Syracuse City School District students have access to tuition scholarship support at two dozen private institutions and SUNY/CUNY—and we have sent about 1,000 students to college through Say Yes in the last two years.

To date, we have rolled out our comprehensive program in three of the city’s four quadrants, with after-school programs at 18 schools and an academically oriented summer camp attended by 1,600 students this past summer. We have dramatically reduced caseloads for school social workers. Five private law firms and five nonprofits are providing free legal assistance to District families, and we’re piloting a health insurance program for them.

Because we know that the prosperity of our city is at stake, we’re very encouraged by the early indicators of the sweeping impact of Say Yes. We’ve seen enrollment in the city schools increase for the first time in a decade—by 300 this fall—which tells us that parents are choosing to move or keep their children in city schools. We’ve seen median home sales values increase by 3.5%, even with a persistently sluggish real estate market. And we’ve already seen the drop-out

“Let us be dissatisfied until America will no longer have a high blood pressure of creeds and an anemia of deeds...

Let us be dissatisfied until the tragic walls that separate the outer city of wealth and comfort from the inner city of poverty and despair shall be crushed by the battering rams of the forces of justice...

Let us be dissatisfied until slums are cast into the junk heaps of history and every family will live in a decent, sanitary home.

Let us be dissatisfied until the dark yesterdays of segregated schools will be transformed into bright tomorrows of quality integrated education...

There will be those moments when the buoyancy of hope will be transformed into the fatigue of despair...

But difficult and painful as it is, we must walk on in the days ahead with an audacious faith in the future.”⁹

It is that faith in the future that comes so readily, when universities, whether private like ours or public like the great land-grant institutions that Lincoln first chartered, accept the challenges and the opportunities of our public missions, engaging with our communities in scholarship and education from New York to Texas, today and in the years ahead.

⁹ From speech delivered at the eleventh annual convention of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Atlanta, Georgia, August 16, 1967.