Critics of higher education point to the failure of land-grant universities and community colleges to serve their rural constituencies in meaningful ways. This paper examines one model for bridging the gap between rural problems and educational resources, emphasizing the need for a genuine partnership between rural people and educational professionals.

Creating a Rural Mandate: Impacting Institutional and State Policies

by William H. Gray

The needs of rural people have historically been addressed from the vantage point of an urban theorist applying proven tools and techniques outward from the city. Based largely on notions from economic geography, it has been argued that rural areas can best be advanced when policy is directed toward growth centers, because they are the most effective at promoting population and economic growth in a region. The resulting concentrations enable the most efficient delivery of services.

When addressed under the banner of rural development, public policy has been predicated upon an assumed connection between the natural resource base and subsequent social and cultural development of rural areas. Recent research reported by Blakeley (1983), however, indicates few discrete relationships between the development of natural resources and the reduction of rural poverty. Emerging information technologies are leading to the development of new base economies that are not producer oriented, but related to distribution and transfer of information and allied products (Dillman, 1985).

It now appears that natural resources are no longer a major contribution to rural economic development. While still enormously important to a region because of the wealth they generate, they are "far less significant to the generation of jobs, improvement of living standards, and facilitations of community development activities. Human,

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rather than natural, resources must be the key to improving rural economies" (Blakeley, 1983). People, not the land, must become the central ingredient in economic development. In order to bring this shift in line with the needs of rural areas in an information society, rural development policy must now embrace a strategy that increases the capacity of rural institutions to develop people.

Higher Education as a Vehicle for Rural Development

Higher education is often viewed as an important agent of change impacting rural areas. After all, many publicly supported institutions of higher education were developed (and sold) based upon the needs of the common man. Beginning with the Morrill Act of 1862, "a system of industrial Universities . . . would develop a more liberal and practical education among the people, tend the more to intellectualize the rising generation, and eminently conduce to the virtue, intelligence and true glory of the common country." This system was expanded in 1914 with passage of the Smith-Lever Act forming what is known as the Cooperative Extension Service, the largest mechanism of lifespan learning yet known. The resulting land-grant university system, with research, teaching, and service as its mission has historically been focused on serving rural areas.

Other publicly supported institutions (e.g., the community college in America) had similar philosophic basis: "open door" enrollment policy for the common man. At a minimum, these institutions can be viewed as an opportunity for upward mobility through education. From another vantage point, the advent of these popular institutions could be viewed as planned intervention to transform a nation (most particularly rural areas) from an agrarian to an industrial society.

When viewed in this latter light, these institutions have been largely successful. However, the activism and educational advocacy targeted toward the common man has given way to a middle class, if not elitist form of education as financial pressures force these institutions to become market driven. Forces within academic disciplines and within the culture of higher education have led to an inertia of present forms at the expense of service to areas of need (however defined). Specifically, research and instruction become emphasized at the expense of public service. Further manifestation of this change includes the following:

- the land-grant university is tending toward a technological/engineering approach to service,
- regional universities have become primarily teaching institutions as budgets are increasingly scrutinized,
- community colleges lose their comprehensiveness in tough times, instead returning to the junior college model of treating the service district as a catchment area for student enrollment,
- cooperative extension programs have returned to that which is comfortable – agriculture and home economics – and away from human and community development.
- community education has not developed beyond a vehicle for personal enrichment.

In the absence of planned external advocacy, these trends result in a narrowing interpretation of the mission of postsecondary education, to the possible exclusion of public service and to the disadvantage of isolated areas.

In this paper, we will introduce a model developed, field tested and refined at Washington State University to im-

prove the fit between rural development needs and the role and mission of institutions of higher education in Washington. The change vehicle, known as the Partnership for Rural Improvement (PRI), was initiated in 1976 with partial support from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. After a decade of experimentation and development, PRI constitutes a viable model for fostering change in public postsecondary education.

Models for Rural Development[2]

Past development strategies have been narrow in scope, limited either by the problem addressed or the unit of analysis chosen. The individual and the community have been the traditional focal points for actvities intended to stimulate improvement in rural conditions. For example, farm programs have supported individual or firm efforts to increase income through price supports, conservation payments and loan programs. Development programs have introduced projects that would produce community improvement through broadly based citizen problem-solving groups, improved organization, or specific activities to alleviate sewer, water or transportation problems.

These thrusts have tended to be limited in scope; that is, they have focused on the solution of a single problem or a narrow range of problems (such as increasing farm income). Or, they have focused on single communities or small groups of communities, while failing to take sufficient account of the impacts and overriding influence of forces imposed from outside the locality.

Development programs of this order have certainly helped many individuals and communities; but they have not achieved a sufficiently broad conception of social organization, nor taken account of the critical role that complex organizations play in generating or obstructing change. Many communities are caught up in a regional, state or national organizational matrix which positively or negatively influences improvement opportunities to a greater degree than local decisions. Local officials and citizens certainly have some influence on local affairs, but many of the decisions which affect communities most decisively are made by firms, or other organizations based outside the local area (Warren, 1972).

Local community institutions have gradually lost many of the functions they formerly performed, while specialized public and private agencies have become more efficient in providing these services. Local leadership for solving specialized problems has been partially replaced by highly mobile professional problem-solvers who feel relatively little allegiance or responsibility to any single locality. Moreover, both professionals and local leaders have difficulty perceiving rural problems in a holistic sense and fail to understand how the program for which they work is related to the activities of other individuals, agencies or communities. This suggests a need for new or adapted professional roles to strengthen or create linkages between communities and institutions, while filling a gap in the knowledge application process (Williams, Youmans, and Sorensen, 1975; Moe and Tamblyn, 1974).

Identification of Elements of a Comprehensive Development Strategy

Regional development programs have tended to limit their concerns to physical or economic development issues, without sufficient attention to social and political development, while educational programs have often been ineffective in applying available knowledge to solution of rural problems (Moe, 1975).

Moe and Tamblyn (1974) discuss requirements for a more integrated design of rural development systems which include: (1) increased problem solving and knowledge utilization capacity at the local level; (2) increased problem solving and knowledge utilization in regional, state and federal organizations which serve local areas; (3) strengthening of linkages among the levels so that the two-way exchange can occur; (4) research and development as an ongoing process which will continuously enable individual communities and organizations to improve their development capacity; and (5) a revised organizational arrangement that makes increased use of the capabilities of public and private educational and research institutions.

A broad assembly of models have been proposed for resolving the rural improvement dilemma. No attempt will be made here to thoroughly summarize and evaluate the full range of possibilities. Rather, the focus is on those models which are most closely related to the strategy emphasized in the Partnership for Rural Improvement.

Havelock (1969) developed a research utilization model which has since been tested in a variety of educational settings. It has potential as part of a systematic rural improvement process. The model emphasizes a problem or "user" orientation: a problem in need of resolution is defined by an individual or group, followed by systematic searching for knowledge and skills to resolve the issue.

Rothman extends the Havelock model through a more deliberate scheme for deriving knowledge application from social science research. He assumes a six-stage process which begins with the basic knowledge pool and culminates with broad use of the knowledge (Rothman, 1974). The rationale for the Rothman model rests on the apparent continued failure to systematically retrieve useful information from the basic research pool to solve problems or realize opportunities. Solutions to problems or realization of opportunities can be experimentally operationalized through field testing, Rothman suggests. Results can be refined and then widely diffused for broad use by individuals, groups, and organizations. The model has appeal because it assumes that knowledge can be systematically applied if an adequate process is developed.

Eberts (1971) and Sismondo (1973) have developed and tested a model which focuses on community change, but which has implications for broader regional application. The fundamental stimulus to development, they suggest, comes through the appearance of new formal linkages between communities and organizations (Sismondo, 1973:31). Eberts tested the model empirically through analysis of data from a sample of non-metropolitan cities in New York state, and with a sample of 300 counties of the northeast United States. The model assumes that any development program must begin with policy objectives which lead to changes in structural conditions.

In conceptualizing the Partnership for Rural Improvement, elements were selected from each of these approaches or models. The resulting model includes these elements: user oriented, systematic application of knowledge, policy objectives that lead to structural changes, and interrelated change strategies.

PRI has operationalized these conceptual elements into a comprehensive framework for rural development. Institutions of higher education constitute the resource system; rural communities comprise the user system. The PRI framework binds these separate systems together into a consortium oriented towards rural community problem solving. The core elements of the PRI intervention process are: collaboration among institutions around a common

problem, the linkage function, the organizational neutrality necessary to carry out the linkage model, and the development of staff roles which focus on the relationships between units of knowledge and action systems.[3]

Models of Organizational Change Within Higher Education

The responsiveness of higher education to the needs of rural areas must be addressed in the larger context of the nature and purpose of higher education. Different perspectives on the nature and purpose of higher education are revealed through three popular metaphors – ivory tower, social service station, and culture mart (Aldelman, 1973). Each concept of higher education is characterized by a different definition of service and differing perspectives on its role and function in higher education. Service can be provided through the fulfillment of teaching and research, through "ideas of value," through social criticism, through social problem solving, or through social activism. Each form of service has its advocates in historical and contemporary literature. Common conceptions of service include:

- **college or university service:** committees or other governance activities internal to the department, college, school, or campus related to program development and institutional policy.
- **professional service:** committee, editorial, or other work for national or regional professional associations and/or academic disciplines.
- **public service:** activities "other than" basic research and teaching involving direct relationships with groups external to the academic community. (Crosson, 1983)

For our purposes, the first two are dismissed as too narrowly oriented to the educational organization and academic discipline respectively.

The latter definition of public service—that which is "other than" basic research and teaching and involves relationships with external groups—is useful as a starting point but not sufficiently specific. Many of the activities carried out under the banner of service are research activities; many others are teaching activities. What differentiates "public" service activities from research and teaching activities is that they are performed for groups that have not traditionally been involved with higher education. The composition of those "external" groups changes over time. It is therefore necessary to continually redefine public service in terms of the current dynamics of institutional-societal relationships.

A definition appropriate to the current context of higher education must include three major areas:

- advice, information, and technical assistance to business, government, neighborhood groups, and individuals on problems with which the University has competence;
- research toward the solution of public policy problems whether by individual or groups of faculty members or by the formal institutes and centers of the University;
- conferences, institutes, seminars, workshops, shortcourses, and other non-degree-oriented upgrading and training for government officials, social service personnel, various professional people, business executives, and so on (University of Massachusetts, 1971).

This set of definitions covers the range of possible service activities—including research and teaching services—and the range of potential beneficiaries of college and university public service.

The PRI program has sought to include elements of the above definition into the rhetoric of the higher educational system, to develop a mechanism which incorporates that function into that system, and to find a funding vehicle for its continuation. The task, however, is made increasingly complex by the different role and mission of the various educational providers: research university, land-grant university, regional university, community college, and common school (Zimmerman and Gray, 1983).

Operationalizing a Rural/Higher Education Partnership

The Partnership for Rural Improvement was developed with partial support from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to "devise" appropriate organizational forms to bridge the gap between rural problems on the one hand, and the lack of university resources available to address those problems. . . ." (Kinsinger, 1982). The Foundation frequently employs a strategy of providing developmental funds that enable a service agency to mount a new but untried venture, with the promise of a major breakthrough and demonstration of a better way to carry out its mission. Assistance to Washington State University to enable public service/rural development work was in this foundation's programming tradition.

Because of its multi-faceted design, the mission of PRI varies according to the perspective of the describer. What may be an end for some would legitimately be a means for others. For rural citizens, the mission may be to assist them in improving their collective well-being. For Washington State University, the mission may be to strengthen its capability to support community or regional planning and development functions. Or, it may be viewed as a strategy to modify the land-grant university structure and mode of operation toward more effective integration of instructional, research and extension resources. The mission may be to provide assistance to public service agencies that would enhance the effectiveness of their functions. Each of these perspectives is legitimate.

The Partnership for Rural Improvement was initiated in 1976 to strengthen capacity for rural improvement from two levels: (1) within rural communities and regions, where individual citizens, local officials, and members of public agencies are principle participants; and (2) within agencies and institutions which have specific responsibility for assisting rural people where agency and institutional professionals are the major participants. The program particularly focuses on increasing the ability of educational institutions to provide a broader range of more appropriate kinds of assistance to rural regions.

The relationship between these spheres (institutions and the community) does not occur naturally; rather it requires fostering within each separate sphere. The culture and reward structures of rural communities and institutions of higher education differ markedly. (See Figure 1)

Figure 1. Characteristics of Spheres

Formal Models/ Institutions	Informal Models/ Rural Communities
Hi-tech	Low tech
Non-responsive	Personalized
FTE driven	Socially driven

Figure 2
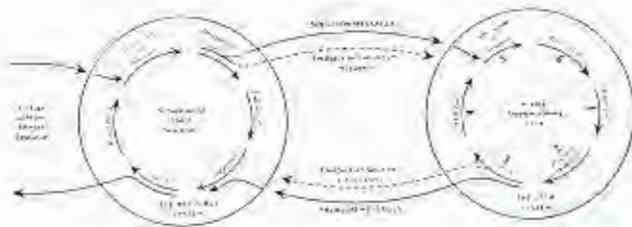
To be successful, educational and development programs in small communities must recognize the informal context of rural life. Programs must be relevant to the community context and the lives of rural people. This emphasis contradicts tendencies within the university structure which tend to value the general and abstract, rather than the specific and concrete. Richard Margolis (1981) summed up the options of several rural educators like this: "Rural people tend to think locally and to act socially. Therefore, the best way to reach them is through local programs that the whole community has a stake in."

The PRI intervention draws heavily on the linkage model to bring together the separate spheres (Haveock, 1973). As illustrated in Figure 2, linkage is seen as a series of two-way interaction processes which connect user systems with various resource systems, including basic and applied research, development and practice. Senders and receivers can achieve successful linkage only if they exchange messages in two-way interaction and continuously make the effort to simulate each other's problem solving behavior. Hence, the resource systems must appreciate the user's needs and problem solving patterns; and the user, in turn, must be able to appreciate the invention, solution formulation, and evaluation processes of resource systems. This type of collaborative interaction will not only make solutions more relevant and effective, but will also build relationships of trust between user and resource persons and a mutual perception that the other is truly concerned, will listen, and is able to provide useful information. Over time these trust relations become channels for the rapid, effective and efficient transfer of information.

PRI was designed to provide a connection between resources for community problem solving and the local users of those resources. The essence of the PRI model is the initiation, maintenance, and strengthening of linkages between resource providers and users on a continuing, organized basis.

The PRI consortium of educational institutions, governmental agencies and citizens is located precisely at the interface of knowledge and action. Within the community, a full-time program associate position has been developed jointly by the land-grant university and participating community colleges.[4] These positions serve as the first line linkage between knowledge and action. At each of the participating four-year universities and colleges, community service centers have been developed to stimulate the interface between research and practice. Each of the "partners" in PRI contribute specialized knowledge and unique perspectives. Action is implemented by the exchange of this knowledge through a process of mutual learning.

In this linking of university resources into the community, the university and community both gain. On one hand, the rural community receives knowledge from the educational institutions. On the other hand, the educational institutions gain insight and knowledge from the rural communities. The field experience is carried back into the classroom where it is shared with the emerging professionals and students.

To achieve a socially viable planning and development process, local people must perceive the activity as "theirs" and the process as involving them. The PRI program associates seek to engage these individuals in activities through which perspectives are shared, mutual learning occurs and conflict can be resolved. The program associate is a contributor and a participant in these dialogues, providing the benefits of special knowledge while seeking knowledge from citizens.

Community problem-solving becomes a social process as knowledge and action are linked. The task is one of planning and working with the community, not for it. The notion of expert-client relationships is dispelled and community capacity and local control are enhanced. In the last phase of the strategy there is gradual withdrawal of the PRI staff roles allowing the local community increased independence in tasks which they now have the knowledge and skills to undertake. Technical assistance remains available, but PRI staff encourage and support local self-sufficiency.

This linkage system requires the support of staff persons skilled in a number of functional roles and who are identified as "neutral," that is, as a staff to the Partnership, rather than as a representative of a single resource provider. Ideally, the administrator and core staff are direct employees of the governing board of the Partnership. Only in this arrangement are they likely to be effective long-term advocates in a multi-institutional framework.

Maintaining Support for Educational Innovation

Innovative programs are commonplace within today's institutions of higher education, providing they are externally funded. Few change programs, however, are incorporated by the institution. In those relatively few instances where they are, the innovative element is often submerged by the larger mission of the bureaucracy.

Major grant making organizations, like the W.K. Kellogg Foundation have begun to extract "maintenance of effort" agreements as a precondition for funding support. While this makes life a little easier for the program administrator, it has little bearing on the degree to which program elements are incorporated. Rural programs continue to be viewed as "marginal" to most institutions of higher education, in spite of FTE commitments.

After a decade of experience in pioneering new organizational forms for public service in higher education, the PRI program has succeeded in surfacing rural development and rural learners onto the agendas of institutions of higher education in Washington. Core positions in the Partnership are largely funded through the reallocation of instructional funds. However, resources for continued program development and innovation will likely have to come from external sources.

The next generation of the partnership will be program interaction between higher education and state agencies and institutions as the client/user system. It is anticipated that the resulting partnership will demonstrate the need for a linking mechanism between higher education and state government in the economic development arena. State support for planned change efforts of the type described in this paper should follow.

Footnotes

Educational Considerations

Utah. It has benefited from the comments of Mary Emery, University of Idaho Cooperative Extension and Jackie Spears, Kansas State University.

[2]This section draws heavily from sections of the summative report to the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, "Cycles of Change: Seven Years of Partnership, 1976-1983."

[3]For a discussion of these elements, the reader is referred to Braglio-Luther, et al., "Cycles of Change: Seven Years of Partnership, 1976-1983."

[4]The collaboration process and staff roles are described more fully in the McDaniel and Loomis article in this volume.

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