

Engaged Scholarship and Learning at Emory: The Northwest Atlanta Community Outreach Partnership Center

Northwest Atlanta is perhaps best known for its main thoroughfare, Bankhead Highway, now named Donald Lee Hollowell Parkway. It's a place where children living in public housing look out their bedroom windows and see spiked black metal fencing and beyond that rows and rows of headstones in a large cemetery. It's a place where the only food stores are small, expensive and poorly maintained quick marts next to pawn shops in ragged shopping strips with no sidewalks. It's a forgotten part of the city, judging by the crumbling roads, the boarded up businesses, the piles of junk in weedy vacant lots.

It's also a place where parents and community leaders are fighting to give children a brighter future and where Emory's Office of University-Community Partnerships (OUCP) has been working with them for the past three and a half years to make

Northwest Atlanta a safer and healthier place. These efforts took place under the name Northwest Atlanta Community Outreach Partnership Center, or COPC, and included research, service, and teaching projects engaging dozens of Emory faculty, students and staff. This report looks at the Northwest Atlanta COPC – its people and its activities, its successes and its lessons.

The Northwest Atlanta COPC demonstrates the transformative power of engaged scholarship, or more simply, connecting the classroom and the campus to the community. The positive impact on Emory's students and faculty and on Emory's community partners is clear, and illustrates why Emory has committed \$7 million toward Preparing Engaged Scholars, one of the five university-wide strategic themes defined in Emory's Strategic Plan for the next several years.

About the Northwest Atlanta Community Outreach Partnership Center	
Launch Date:	November 11, 2004
End Date:	April 22, 2008
HUD Funding:	\$400,000
Community Support:	\$103,990
Emory Support:	\$416,389
Total Number of Engaged Scholars	
Community Building Fellows:	31
Undergraduates as Part of Course:	57
Undergraduate Researchers:	5
Undergraduate Volunteers:	81
Graduates as Part of Course:	19
OUCP Graduate Fellows:	6
Graduate Volunteers:	2
Faculty Teaching:	8
Faculty Research:	2
Total Number of Engaged Community Members	
Workshop Participants:	201
Parents:	25
School Teachers:	35
Middle School Students:	140
Partner Organizations:	25

Taking our Daughters to Work

Twenty-four Carson girls got a taste of college and work life when they came to Emory in April 2007 for Take our Daughters to Work Day. This past April, another forty-five sixth graders from the new Coretta Scott King Young Women's Leadership Academy, which along with the BEST Boys Academy is replacing Carson Prep, enjoyed Take Our Daughters to Work Day. The young scholars went to classes in business, nursing, psychology, philosophy, biology, and women's studies and spent time shadowing Emory employees at Emory Creative Group and Emory Communications, Emory Human Resources, Emory Police, Emory Athletics, Faculty Staff Assistance Program, Emory Alumni Association, the Center for Women at Emory, Emory Clinic, Grady Hospital, and Accounting. Emory Transportation Services provided Cliff buses to get the aspiring scholars to and from Emory both years. Co-sponsored by the OUCP and the President's Commission on the Status of Women at Emory, Take our Daughters to Work Day highlighted the positive power of collaboration – and inspiration – in education.

The OUCP collected more than \$2,000 in school supplies with three campus-wide holiday collection drives. Supplies were distributed to COPC area schools and to the parent resource centers in the community. Emory's chapter of Mortar Board, a national student honor society, collected more than \$7,000 in new and used books and magazine subscriptions through two spring collection campaigns. Their advisor, Assistant Dean and Director of Student Development Cynthia Shaw, presented the books, along with inspirational words, to Carson students at their Back to School Rally in 2006.

Sharing Resources

History

The Northwest Atlanta COPC grew out of the work of three Emory Community Building Fellows in 2004, undergraduates trained by the OUCP to foster collaboration and leverage research to advance solutions to urban communities' most pressing problems. The Atlanta Public Schools (APS) and the Atlanta Housing Authority (AHA) asked the Fellows to work with families living in AHA's Northwest Atlanta communities and design strategies for engaging parents as partners in middle school. Their proposal, built upon exhaustive best practices research and countless conversations with neighborhood parents, was so compelling, APS and AHA committed to a three-year pilot.

APS and AHA backed Emory's Office of University-Community Partnerships in applying to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for funds to support the project, which would be augmented by activities addressing community factors known to affect family well being – housing quality and affordability; access to community resources like libraries, groceries, and health care; and community leadership and resident engagement.

Since 1994 HUD's Office of University Partnerships has offered Community Outreach Partnership Centers (COPC) grants to help colleges and universities establish and implement outreach and applied research activities that address problems in urban communities. The grant program aims to transform higher education so that students and faculty are collaborators with, not observers or dominators of, neighborhood entities working to better their communities.

Emory's OUCP received a \$400,000 grant, the maximum possible, from HUD in late 2004 to launch the Northwest Atlanta COPC. The plan called for engaging Emory faculty and students through courses, internships, research projects, and public education activities over three and a half years.

Strengthening Families and Schools as Partners for Children

Middle school. It's make-or-break time: students can acquire the fundamentals for success in high school and the chance to go on to college, or they can lose interest in academics and drift toward dropping out. Understanding this critical time, the Northwest Atlanta COPC sponsored school-based and community-based activities for the students, their parents and



their teachers at Benjamin S. Carson Honors Preparatory School, a traditional public middle school serving Northwest Atlanta. They included the Middle School Mentoring Program, Parents and Children Coming Together or PACCT Family Fun Nights, pep rallies, book and school supply drives, teacher professional development workshops, and Take our Daughters to Work Day.

Mentoring Matters

Over three years, fifty Emory undergraduates who enrolled in a special topics course on Community Psychology – created and first taught by assistant professor of Psychiatry Rebekah Bradley and later taught by Education Studies Adjunct Lecturer Andrea Abrams – employed classroom studies about factors affecting youth development and behavior to create and run an afterschool mentoring program for fifty 6th, 7th, and 8th grade girls at Carson Prep. More than 1400 hours of mentoring by Emory students helped the Carson girls not only stay in school, they also nurtured the girls' dreams of being college students themselves.

Swoop Cheers Success in School

Emory's mascot, Swoop, became Carson's mascot, too, appearing each year at Carson's Back to School and Spring Test Time pep rallies, as well as at several community events. Children of all ages flocked to Swoop, hugging and high-fiving their feathered friend, who encouraged them to aim high and to love learning.



Strengthening Families

Graduate students in Psychology Professor Sherryl Goodman's Intervention II class drew upon their classroom training to coach a dozen parents about more effective ways to communicate with and respond to their teens. The clinical psychologists-in-training gained invaluable experience working with families very different from those usually seen in their clinical practice. The families benefited, too. For example, Dr. Goodman and her students provided a troubled family with the evaluations and testing their struggling daughter needed to pinpoint her learning challenges. They didn't stop there, but rather collaborated with the OUCP to advocate with the family for an individualized educational plan and appropriate instructional supports for their daughter. The young lady progressed and was able to transition successfully to high school.

Teachers Involving Parents

Northwest Atlanta COPC sponsored three six-session workshops for teachers at Carson Prep about involving parents as partners in education. A total of nineteen teachers completed the series and the majority reported improved views of parents as a result. As a way to shift pervasive negative thinking about students and parents, the teachers joined forces to create "Positive Notes Home," which provided Carson teachers with templates and materials to send at least one note a month to each parent identifying a positive trait or accomplishment of that parent's child(ren). Northwest Atlanta COPC provided materials and postage.



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Promoting Affordable Housing and Equitable Development

As intown Atlanta neighborhoods become more attractive places to call home, the challenge is to preserve housing options for longtime residents while considering compatible housing opportunities for newcomers. The Northwest Atlanta COPC undertook research, sponsored public education events, and worked to build the capacity of local leaders and organizations grappling with these competing pressures.

Assessing Housing Conditions

After assessing the condition and use of all properties in the neighborhood, a team of undergrad interns and alumni Community Building Fellows found that the real problem was not rundown rental properties, as local leaders had thought, but rather a lack of resources to help elderly homeowners repair and maintain their homes. A grassroots campaign then helped elder homeowners apply for senior homestead exemptions and connect with nonprofits offering home repair assistance.

Understanding Policy and Political History

Emory Law Professor Frank Alexander guided law student Justice Bowers in preparing a legal and political history of COPC neighborhoods during summer 2006. This work would help the COPC team better understand the assessment of land use and property conditions completed for the COPC by the Community Design Center of Atlanta. That fall of 2006, law students in Visiting Assistant Professor Nancy Walsh's Housing and Community Development Law Seminar researched policies and legal tools like eminent domain, public housing transformation, and tax allocation districts to further inform consideration about best approaches for preserving affordable housing in COPC neighborhoods.

Educating the Community

More than 100 community residents, elected officials, community leaders, for-profit and nonprofit housing developers, and students took a crash course in Atlanta's housing crisis on a chilly Saturday in February. The Housing for All! Summit paired sobering housing facts and figures, presented by Mike Carnathan of the Atlanta Regional Commission, with preliminary findings from the Emory OUCP's study of gentrification in Atlanta neighborhoods, presented by OUCP Graduate Fellow Kelly Hill. Longtime housing scholar and emeritus GA Tech professor Larry Keating reflected on the public policies and practices of the past few decades that have eliminated thousands of people from Atlanta's current housing market. In the afternoon, testimonials from residents bookended a conversation moderated by OUCP Partnerships Director Nathaniel Smith about solutions and next steps among some of Atlanta's most respected community advocates: Atlanta Housing and Neighborhood-based Developers, GA STAND-UP, Enterprise Partners, and The Center for Working Families. Atlanta City Councilmembers Mary Norwood and Felicia Moore, who both took notes the entire day, left with ideas and renewed commitment to work on behalf of Northwest Atlanta and all neighborhoods in transition.

Mobilizing Leadership

A series of one-on-one interviews with community leaders this spring revealed strong support for creating a new, community-controlled organization to influence or lead community revitalization efforts in Northwest Atlanta, where no such entity exists. Leaders noted that success will depend on improving collaborative efforts among entities already working in or on behalf of North-

west Atlanta; many identified Emory and the Northwest Atlanta COPC as important to future success. More than a dozen leaders committed themselves to moving from conversation to action.

Learning from Best Practices

Twenty-five Northwest Atlanta leaders boarded a Cliff bus in April and visited three community development corporations (CDCs) that are developing affordable housing and effectively improving quality of life in their communities: RRC in southeast Atlanta; Pittsburgh Community Improvement Association in a neighborhood near Turner Field; and University Community Development Corporation in the neighborhoods around the Clark Atlanta University Center. Impact Group, working in suburban Gwinnett County, showcased its best practices during a lunchtime presentation.



Building Community Capacity

The Northwest Atlanta COPC sponsored or underwrote resident participation in several training and skills development activities:

- Two-day **Asset-Based Community Development** workshop presented by the Asset-Based Community Development Institute at Northwestern University in summer 2004 for sixteen Emory Community Building Fellows, three OUCP Graduate Fellows, and nineteen community leaders.
- **Board Member Development Workshop** presented by the Georgia State Trade Association of Nonprofit Developers attended by four community residents.
- Annual **Fall Affordable Housing Conference** presented by Georgia State Trade Association of Nonprofit Developers attended by several community residents.

Acting on Community Building

Emory Community Building Fellows joined forces with Grove Park resident leaders in summer 2005 to form Grove Park Arts Alliance, a grassroots effort using visual and performing arts as a common ground on which longtime and newer residents could bond. Led by Grove Park resident and former COPC Coordinator Nicole Taylor, Grove Park Arts secured a \$2400 grant from United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta to stage a play written and performed by residents about the changes taking place in their community, which sparked animated community conversation about ways to leverage the positive changes without losing the heart and soul of the community.

About the Office of University-Community Partnerships

Created by the Provost in 2000, the Office of University-Community Partnerships is charged with integrating teaching and research at Emory with service to benefit the greater Atlanta community and beyond. The OUCP connects and supports the many academically-oriented community-benefiting activities taking place throughout the nine academic units and the myriad centers, programs, offices, and departments of Emory, with the goal of creating a continuum of engaged learning, research and service opportunities for all students at Emory. The OUCP also serves as an easily accessible and highly responsive centralized point of first contact for community groups, nonprofit organizations, and government agencies seeking Emory's intellectual assistance. Visit www.oucp.emory.edu for more information.

OUCP & COPC Team

Principal Investigator: Michael J. Rich, Associate Professor of Political Science and Director, OUCP

Sam Marie Engle, Senior Associate Director
Moshe Haspel, Director of Research and Evaluation, and Adjunct Assistant Professor of Political Science
Michael Leo Owens, Assistant Professor of Political Science and OUCP Senior Faculty Fellow
Nathaniel Q. Smith, Director of Partnerships for Equitable Development

Kate D. Grace, Director of Community Building Fellows Program
Brendan Moriarty, IT Coordinator
Connie L. Pierce, Accountant
Rhonda Thompson, Office Manager
Alicia Sanchez, Program Assistant
Brian Ludwin, Student Assistant
Iveoma Okparaek, Student Assistant

Community Partners

ABLE/Gamaliel
Agape Center
Atlanta Board of Education – LaChandra Butler, Chair and District 5, and Emmett Johnson, Seat 9
Atlanta City Council – Offices of Honorable Felicia Moore, District 9, and Honorable Ivory Lee Young, Jr., District 3
Atlanta Housing Authority
Atlanta Housing Association of Neighborhood-based Developers (AHAND)
Atlanta Public Schools
Beltline Tax Allocation District Advisory Committee (TADAC)

Bowen Homes Residents Association
City of Atlanta Bureau of Parks and Recreation
City of Atlanta Bureau of Planning
Community Design Center of Atlanta
Fortified Hills Neighborhood Association
Georgia STAND-UP
Grove Park Recreation Center
Hollywood Courts Residents Association
Hollowell Partners on Education (HOPE)
Men Stopping Violence
The Neighborhood Fund
Neighborhood Planning Unit D
Neighborhood Planning Unit G

Neighborhood Planning Unit J
Northwest Atlanta Business Alliance
Park Pride
Springfield Missionary Baptist Church
United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta

Emory Partners

Emory College and The Graduate School
Division of Education Studies
Department of Political Science
Department of Psychology
Department of Sociology
Rollins School of Public Health

Law School
Michael C. Carlos Museum
Office of the Provost
Division of Campus Life, Center for Student Leadership and Engagement
AHANA Dance Group
Mortar Board
Students Promoting Education Among Kids (SPEAK)
Emory Alumni Association
Emory Athletics
Emory University Transportation Services
President's Commission on the Status of Women
Volunteer Emory
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