

## Connecting a University to a Distant Neighborhood: Three Stages of Learning and Adaptation

By Margaret Bourdeaux Arbuckle, [Ruth Hoogland DeHoog](#)

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### **Abstract:**

The willingness on the part of university participants to listen attentively to community representatives is of great importance to successful collaborations. This article presents three phases of a university-community partnership between the Macedonia neighborhood in High Point, North Carolina, and the Center for the Study of Social Issues (CSSI) at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Although no professional network and neighborhood contacts were in place prior to this collaboration, the partnership addressed community needs by obtaining federal grant funding and by listening to the residents' concerns. Staff, students, and faculty overcame the challenges of inexperience and the difficulty of working with a neighborhood that was not located near the university. In various phases, the partnership moved away from a technical assistance approach to a self-help model. By actively engaging neighborhood residents through the Community Outreach Partnership Center (COPC), a learning and adaptation process occurred that resulted in successful university-community collaboration.

**Keywords:** University - Community partnership | Community Outreach | Collaboration | North Carolina

### **Article:**

The necessary and natural relationships forged by the close proximity of higher education institutions and residential neighborhoods have been the basis for many of the Community Outreach Partnership Center (COPC) projects funded by U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) over the last decade (e.g., Farrant & Silka, 1999). However, one successful project may appear to be an anomaly—a COPC set up in a more distant community about twenty miles away from the university, in a city and neighborhood that historically had no demands or expectations of the university, and where the involved faculty had no long-standing relationships. The collaboration between the Macedonia neighborhood in High Point, NC and the University of

North Carolina at Greensboro's Center for the Study of Social Issues (CSSI) is the focus of this article. We will analyze how this kind of collaboration developed and largely succeeded in a fairly unique university-community environment from 1996 to the present.

We analyze the process of collaboration through three developmental stages. In the first stage, CSSI developed a relationship with the City of High Point and its low-income neighborhood through the planning and implementation of a Brownfields Revitalization grant, funded through the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). In the second stage, the relationship was broadened to include other community partners, and an outreach program was established in a HUD-funded COPC in the neighborhood. The third stage allowed CSSI to step back to a support role of securing small grants for community building efforts. This stage occurred at the time that the community partners constructed a new community center in the neighborhood and the city initiated an affordable housing program.

This analysis of these three stages of the university-community partnership focuses on three questions. How can a university center forge ongoing collaborations with a community at some distance from its campus? How can a university develop collaborations when prior professional networks, trusting neighborhood contacts, and relevant experience are not in place? Finally, how can a university center shift its roles, methodology, and focus as a community changes and develops its own strategies and funding sources? Our analysis suggests the following: (1) the importance of a compelling community need and openness for partnership development; (2) a strong incentive on the part of the university to obtain funding and support for these partnerships; (3) constant attention to changing relationships and opportunities for meeting needs; and, perhaps most importantly (4) a willingness on the part of the university to *listen* to the community in its process of building a collaborative relationship between the neighborhood residents, the city officials, and the university faculty and students. This case also shows how a university-community partnership evolves through an unplanned process, with critical events and stages unfolding to move campus participants to a deeper understanding of the partners and the community. Our practice experience provides insight toward the development of partnerships in geographic areas in which no prior history of community relationships exist.

## ***BACKGROUND TO THE PARTNERSHIP***

### ***The University of North Carolina at Greensboro***

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) is located near downtown Greensboro, a city of over 223,000. The cities of Greensboro, Winston-Salem, and High Point make up the Piedmont Triad region, one of the three major population centers in the state. Until recently, apart from its longstanding relationship with the public school systems in the region, there were only sporadic or decentralized efforts to work in community outreach or research projects.

To increase UNCG's external research funding, the dean of the Graduate School spearheaded an effort in 1993 to establish a broad, university-wide research center that would assist faculty in the social and behavioral sciences in obtaining large federal grants. With the blessing of the provost, the dean designed a competition among interdisciplinary faculty teams to determine the type and emphasis of such a center. After internal and external reviews of written and oral presentations

by three teams, the provost decided to incorporate all three groups and their ideas into the development of a new center. The one condition was that it focus on issues and needs in the Piedmont Triad region. Thus, in 1996, the Center for the Study of Social Issues (CSSI) was born. Its new and energetic director, a tenured faculty member and team member, was a leading grant-funded scholar in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies. Although she had had no experience working with local agencies and communities, her charge was to get the Center off the ground quickly, with limited university funds, and to begin bringing in grant money to sustain its activities.

### ***High Point, North Carolina***

High Point lies almost 30 minutes driving time southwest of UNCG. The Macedonia neighborhood, the home of a huge semi-annual international furniture market, is located a few blocks from the downtown. While the downtown is marked by large showrooms, neatly landscaped streets, and many furniture retailers, just a few blocks away lies a blighted commercial/industrial area largely made up of abandoned buildings, former textile mills and factories, marginal small businesses and vacant land. In close proximity is a low-income residential area of primarily small rental homes, neglected properties, and public housing. In 1996, about 15% of the homes were considered neglected, vacant, or in disrepair. The population of the rental area was estimated at 1500 highly transient residents. Approximately 72% were African-American, while only 10% of those in public housing were white (DeHoog, 1998). There was also a small but growing Hispanic population in this neighborhood. Until the mid-1970s, the Macedonia neighborhood had been a thriving community, centered on a close-knit African-American community, and surrounded by white residences, small businesses and several factories. By the 1990s, most of the factories had closed their doors and moved to other locations. As hundreds of jobs left the community, so did the economic and social stability of the neighborhood. Prior to the revitalization planning process, Macedonia residents and business owners had not been organized to combat the deteriorating conditions, and had little record of involvement in community affairs. The city's traditional power structure and culture was one of a mill town—a company town in which a small economic elite made most of the decisions.

### ***STAGE I: COME OVER AND HELP US***

#### ***EPA Brownfields Project (1996-1999)***

Within a few months of starting CSSI, the director accepted an invitation by High Point's mayor to attend a series of meetings on the problem of urban brownfields in the region. Brownfields are economically depressed and blighted areas where former manufacturing plants, abandoned buildings, or other activities have created suspicions of environmental contamination and unsafe conditions. The goal was to determine what policies and programs could lead to the reuse and revitalization of these areas. Although the director and two faculty members from the Departments of Business Administration (DBA) and Political Science (DPS) who attended were unfamiliar with the subject of brownfields and urban redevelopment, the mayor's leadership, city employees, and the technical expertise of several key environmental experts kept the process moving. These meetings led to the city of High Point collaborating with the Center to write a grant proposal to the EPA to study the brownfield area near downtown.

During the grant writing process, the targeted area of commercial and industrial sites was expanded geographically to include the adjacent low-income residential area. This expansion allowed High Point to qualify for the minimum geographic area for the EPA grant and to include the low-income residences and public housing as targets for improvement in the project. Most brownfield projects usually focus on cleaning up soil contamination and removing blighted buildings, but the staff of the city's Department of Community Development and Housing (DCDH) believed that addressing the neighborhood's physical condition, housing blight, and social problems were as important to the economic redevelopment effort as were developing new industries and commercial ventures.

*CSSI-City Collaboration.* In May 1997, the EPA awarded the City of High Point the \$200,000 pilot project grant for the West Macedonia area. A sub-grant for community assistance-needs assessment and project evaluation-was awarded to CSSI. (The term "West Macedonia" was originally used in the EPA grant, but the neighborhood association and residents later encouraged the "West" to be dropped, as it had no meaning for the community.) At the point of submission, neither DBA or DPS faculty nor the CSSI Director had visited the neighborhood. None had substantive expertise in environmental contamination, amelioration, or urban revitalization. They were to provide regional market data for the consultant, the needs assessment instruments and methodology, and a modest summary evaluation. This type of work can be described as traditional technical assistance work for faculty consultants. For their part, the City of High Point staff and elected officials had had no prior connections to the faculty and university administration. Two key city staff involved in writing the proposal with CSSI were the heads of DCDH and the Planning Department (PD), two units that had a history of tension and conflict. CSSI's grant writing experience and leadership offered a way to complete the grant proposal on time and to gain a neutral facilitator to assist the city in developing the brownfield assessment process.

In the fall of 1997, during the first months of the funded EPA project, problems between the two city departments and the PD director surfaced. When the management team was officially formed by the mayor and city manager of High Point, it did not include the planning director, who resigned within a few months of the receipt of funding. As a result of this vacuum of leadership, the Director of the CSSI Center was chosen to lead the team. This gave the Director a prominent role in facilitating the team meetings and setting priorities in a community and subject area in which faculty had no prior history. However, being a quick study, and having a forceful personality, the Center Director took charge and, working with the mayor and city staff, moved the project forward by establishing a steering committee, selecting consultants and getting the residential neighborhood involved. The faculty member who organized the needs assessment offered additional assistance through her two graduate students who interned for the city and CSSI. Both the director and the faculty member saw this project as an opportunity to assist the city and gain a track record in a key community partnership that might lead to future grant funding for UNCG.

*Brownfield Research and Evaluation.* Over the next two years, a very successful process took place among the leadership of the management team and a community steering committee. In addition to the overall coordinating and planning process, an environmental site assessment, a business market study, and the community needs assessment were completed within the first 15

months. While the environmental site assessment was conducted without any university involvement, the marketing study relied on Triad area data supplied by the DBA faculty member. The needs assessment was conducted by the DPS faculty and graduate students in the Master of Public Affairs (MPA) program. It included a residential face-to-face survey, a business survey, four focus groups, a quality of life summary, and a final evaluation of the project (DeHoog, 1999). Participants saw the primary successes of the project as crime abatement, community involvement in the planning process, and the lack of any significant soil contamination. In contrast, the market study did not suggest economic development projects that the steering committee believed were feasible (DeHoog, 1999).

*Collaboration Challenges.* From CSSI's point of view, the major challenges were organizing the management team, managing conflict among city government officials, engaging the city's economic development leaders, and getting students to complete the door-to-door residential needs assessment. In particular, the needs assessment was a much more difficult task than originally envisioned. With a 30-minute commute to the neighborhood, no public transportation, and no university transportation, the teams of students faced several barriers. Although police were alerted, students were oriented and trained, and city staff volunteered to assist, the dropout rate was significant. One team of undergraduates promptly quit upon driving into the neighborhood and viewing it as unsafe. Other graduate assistants from CSSI failed to complete their interviews due to lack of transportation, time, or incentives. The class of MPA students picked up their assignments, the two graduate assistants coordinated their work, and the surveys were completed.

From the city's perspective, the EPA grant process and revitalization planning were strongly supported by key community leaders, the local newspaper, and more generally, the public. After two decades of neglect, neighborhood organizing in the city was in its early development. Neighborhood residents were beginning to believe that they could have a role in the process. Nonetheless, as collaborations within the community and with CSSI were fairly new to these city departments, tensions about responsibilities, personalities, and leadership were gradually worked out. Ultimately, the public viewed the city's efforts to involve the community through the needs assessment and public participation in planning as a success. As the *High Point Enterprise* editor wrote in February 14, 1999:

Remarkable progress was made and the project entered 1999 ahead of schedule. The hired guns did their work thoroughly and quickly. Steering committee members who were assigned tasks produced the desired results. West Macedonia neighborhood residents, promised their voices would be heard, enthusiastically joined the party. A neighborhood association has held several meetings-to ask questions, to get answers, to air grievances, to brainstorm. (Blount, 1999, p. A6)

During the second year of the project, the city's staff in the DCDH played the lead role in planning the physical revitalization of the area. This began largely as a straight-forward professional planner-driven process, but soon produced a lesson in neighborhood organizing. In early 1999, a few months after the EPA project consultants' reports were presented to the project steering committee, the High Point Housing Authority (HPHA), an organization outside the city government, presented a plan to build a new community of 34 rental units and a community

center in the heart of the neighborhood. It had been carefully and tastefully designed with the plan to convert the units to owner-occupied condominiums after 15 years. The HPHA director had operated very successfully for many years by presenting his finished plans to the city for support, with the promise of federal HUD funding. However, in this case, the newly formed neighborhood association and many Macedonia residents were outraged that this plan would create more rental properties, and mobilized a strong campaign with some city staff support to block the plan. While several steering committee members supported any physical improvements to the area, the vocal residents and their allies won the day with their argument that home ownership was the only way to improve and stabilize the neighborhood. These residents may not have fully represented the younger renting population in the neighborhood or those living in public housing, yet their clearly articulated views convinced the city's leadership that they should not endorse the proposal. Residents now were a force to be reckoned with. Whether it was due to the opposition or other flaws in the HPHA plan, the project did not receive federal funding, and the residents considered that a victory.

## ***STAGE II: LEARNING FROM OUR MISTAKES***

### ***The Evolution of COPC and Its Relationships***

Even before the first year of the EPA grant was completed, in June 1998, CSSI submitted a proposal to HUD to support a stronger university contribution to the Macedonia neighborhood and bring in new resources for community development. The EPA-funded community needs assessment served as the foundation for the proposal for a Community Outreach Partnership Center (COPC). Overarching goals for the revitalization of the Macedonia neighborhood involved creating a more economically viable and self-sustaining community. The primary expressed needs of the residents were crime reduction, youth recreation and other activities, leadership development, affordable housing, and job training and development. However, in the limited time between analyzing the assessment results and submitting the proposal for the HUD deadline, CSSI staff and faculty failed to consult with the community about the specific programs that would meet these needs. Rather, the writers proposed eight separate programs based on the available resources and willing collaborators with whom they had recently developed relationships within the High Point community and in the university. While in hindsight, this strategy was a flawed one, it illustrates a fairly typical process in university grant writing in which time constraints limit a more comprehensive and thorough review of the options with community feedback.

In October 1998, CSSI was awarded the COPC grant from HUD, and the attention of the director and faculty turned to developing the location and the programs of the COPC. Everyone agreed that the development of the COPC was a direct result of the research and planning work CSSI had done over the course of the prior involvement with the brownfields study. In spring of 1999, the High Point management team disbanded, and the city's community development staff focused on developing a specific land use and housing plan for the area, with a great deal of neighborhood input. At this point, most of the interdepartmental and interpersonal conflicts had been resolved among city employees.

One of the first challenges following the grant announcement was to find the space in the community to house the new COPC. During the needs assessment process the CSSI faculty and staff became increasingly aware of the need for a “place” in the community to host neighborhood meetings, to house new programs, and serve as the visible outreach link between the neighborhood and UNCG. Due to miscommunication and misunderstanding with a local church that had initially offered its facility for the proposal, it was several months before an acceptable location was found. Ultimately, a local community college committed to house the COPC in its High Point campus adjacent to the Macedonia neighborhood as an in-kind contribution to the community efforts. This agreement represented another example of the university connecting in a new way, to expand its relationship with the community college to an outreach partnership in the neighborhood. This office, staffed by a full-time director and two graduate assistants, became the point for information and referral to other city programs, for community meetings such as the Macedonia Neighborhood Association, and for classes for the residents and youth. Another small neighborhood church provided additional space for larger meetings and youth activities.

Once staffed and furnished, the COPC began to focus on social capital development and community building through communication, outreach and neighborhood events. A COPC newsletter and a Macedonia Neighborhood Association newsletter, written by its members were distributed to residents each quarter. A Community Advisory Board (CAB) composed of residents, representatives of community agencies and governmental departments, and UNCG faculty, was organized by the COPC staff to ensure ongoing communication and feedback about COPC programs and community needs. The Macedonia Neighborhood Association, established early on through the EPA project and led by neighborhood residents, had already begun meeting. It became increasingly visible and effective in planning events and activities with COPC support.

Another focus identified through the needs assessment of the EPA grant was crime reduction. This issue had already been addressed somewhat through the High Point Police Department’s city-wide “get-tough” approach in response to an escalation of homicides in the mid-1990s. CSSI and COPC staff joined the Violence Task Group (VTG), which was a merger of the Police Department’s work on violence with a community based group. VTG developed a local model of the Boston Crime Reduction Program, in which parolees are called in and sternly warned not to commit additional gun crimes or a federal prison sentence would result. Widespread community support for this model, vigorous law enforcement leadership, and strong collaborations among public and nonprofit agencies, combined with the activities of COPC, such as Neighborhood Watch Programs and neighborhood policing. These efforts led to a 13% reduction in violent crime over a five year period (Frabut, 2002).

As a spin off of the Task Force, the Youth Violence Task Group was created. This group initiated a two-pronged approach to addressing youth violence: service coordinators were placed in the Office of Juvenile Justice in High Point to address the needs of adjudicated youth and their families, with particular attention to Macedonia families; and a school-based program developed in one of the local high schools provided wrap-around support services and intervention for at-risk youth. Three other crime prevention programs were also developed as part of COPC with community partners. These included the designation as a “Safe Site” in the Macedonia community to offer education and haven to residents; Macedonia Neighborhood Watch Program, in collaboration with the Neighborhood Association, to increase residential awareness; and the

Junior Police Academy, in which neighborhood youth participated in a Police Department summer program.

### ***Changing Strategies to Respond to Resident Interests***

As previously noted, the original EPA needs assessment was critical in determining the direction for the COPC grant proposal. Nonetheless, the specifics described in the COPC proposal had to be changed or eliminated upon the involvement of residents. Using the input of the Advisory Committee and the Neighborhood Association members, as well as feedback from community meetings, COPC staff worked with the neighborhood residents to develop programs that more closely met community residents' needs. For example, the original youth and crime prevention project, the Junior Police Academy, became an ongoing program of the High Point Police Department. The COPC youth programs focused on the development of a new project—a youth baseball league. Initiated by a former baseball player and public housing resident who participated in COPC's leadership development program, the youth baseball league became a huge success. Not only have many neighborhood youth ages 8-12 participated in playing baseball, they have also been coached and supported by community residents, civic clubs, and baseball fans from across High Point. Recognizing the significance of the emergence of the Macedonia Baseball Association for the youth and the community, the city donated land and developed a baseball park in the neighborhood in time for the 2003 season. The Director of the COPC with support of neighborhood residents and city leadership nominated the league's creator for state and national awards given to honor community heroes.

A second example of a "change in strategy" in response to resident interests (or lack thereof) was seen in the redirection of the leadership development program. Originally included in the COPC proposal, the eight-week CAN DO leadership program was taught twice by a UNCG faculty member to community residents. Yet when a third class offering resulted in little interest, the COPC staff, in consultation with the Advisory Committee and the Neighborhood Association, decided to design other kinds of leadership programs. In partnership with community-based organizations, COPC offered a pilot proposal writing workshop series that resulted in the award of three city grants for grassroots initiatives, computer training workshops, women's leadership and literacy group, and meetings for job-seeking residents. Macedonia residents and other members of the larger community participated in these opportunities, thus enriching individual lives and bringing additional resources into the community. Two examples of the more innovative efforts were a pilot Music Business Workshop for youth and the Star Achievers program, which awarded school supplies to students returning to school and incentives to those who demonstrated academic improvement. Also, the COPC established and maintained the use of a language line service within a neighborhood school for non-English speaking parents. UNCG's language faculty members, as part of the COPC, conducted research on its use and impact on children and families' lives in their adjustment to school.

In facilitating neighborhood empowerment, COPC recruited and supervised volunteers, graduate assistants, and interns from UNCG to participate in several other programs identified as needed by residents during community meetings: health fairs, youth recreation and activity programs, English as a Second Language (ESOL) tutoring, and opportunities to learn about other community resources and agencies. As the relationship with the Macedonia community

developed, the “distance issue” was resolved by involving graduate assistants who viewed their placement as a job and the faculty and staff involved with the community adjusted to the distance as a “commute” to the location.

Additionally, in response to the high dropout rate in the area high schools, the need for job training, and the increased pressure for CSSI to be successful in securing grants, UNCG developed a HUD-funded Youth Build program. The primary recruitment area for participants has been the Macedonia community and the other central city neighborhoods of High Point. Youth Build identifies high school dropouts, aged 16-25, who desire a GED and work skills. Partnering with Guilford Technical Community College, local construction companies, the High Point Housing Authority, and many public and human service agencies, CSSI again moved into an area without previous expertise with this youth population or in home construction. Now in its third year, the CSSI Youth Build program is considered exemplary by HUD, particularly as an example of excellent community partnerships, and the staff is frequently asked by the regional HUD office to provide information and advice to other Youth Build programs.

The Violence Task Group and the Youth Violence Initiative also exemplified the flexible response and interaction between faculty and members of the High Point community working to address community needs. Having experienced the value of involving citizens at the grassroots level in the program development of the COPC, these initiatives to address community violence utilized the expertise of those directly involved with the neighborhoods to develop programs. Instead of being planned and implemented in a preconceived, structured manner, addressing violence and providing enhanced opportunities for at-risk youth *developed*. While these initiatives were in response to community needs, they led CSSI and faculty who had research interest in areas of violence etiology and prevention, to deep involvement with the community law enforcement and the human service providers.

### ***Meeting Challenges by Adaptation***

These partnerships among the university, community residents, and agencies were built upon the previous work in the EPA grant and the development of the COPC. University faculty and staff *listened* to community residents, established working relationships with the leadership in city agencies and nonprofit providers, and, most importantly, did not portray themselves as *the* experts. Throughout this process, strong and trusting relationships grew among the residents of the Macedonia neighborhood, the leaders of community-based organizations, the faith based organizations, the leadership of the DCDH, and the UNCG faculty and staff. The relationships evolved over time, throughout the process of developing the EPA grant to the implementation of the COPC and other grant programs. It happened because there was awareness by the CSSI staff and other UNCG faculty that working with and in community is not the same as being in the classroom or conducting traditional research. These relationships had to be built upon mutual trust. Just as in other meaningful personal relationships, they take time, patience and commitment. Because there was a mutual willingness to “open up,” the community and the university could become partners. This result did not occur without challenges, such as the denied expectation that a neighborhood church would house the COPC office, or the fact that Kids Korps USA, an organization that initially agreed to provide a youth program, decided against developing a North Carolina chapter.

Additionally, staff changes within the city departments and in the position of the COPC director meant that transitions and relationship building took time and energy away from the program planning, coordination, and implementation. These challenges were met by the persistent involvement of CSSI, the second COPC director, and associated faculty members with the Macedonia neighborhood residents, and the positive results of several COPC program initiatives.

In sum, during this stage, various faculty, staff, and students were involved in projects. Many of these were one-time or one-project types of interactions focused on a particular event or task. As COPC developed, it became clear that the full-time CSSI staff provided the continuity and “glue” to keep the collaborations, relationships, and projects moving along, while the faculty and students were brought in for shorter periods for their expertise and energy when needed. In particular, graduate students in several of the professional programs, not undergraduates, were the most likely to become interested and remain involved as they had their own transportation, greater commitment to community building, and a clearer focus on gaining appropriate professional experience through the COPC projects.

### ***STAGE III: MACEDONIA BECOMES A “PLACE” AGAIN***

#### ***Family Resource Center and Oral History (2002-2003)***

During the development of COPC’s programs, the City of High Point’s Department of Community Development and Housing had continued to focus on the Macedonia neighborhood in response to the residents’ expressed need for safe and affordable housing. Eliminating places that were gathering places for drug sales, dozens of houses in the area were condemned, razed, or rehabbed. A new housing development plan for Macedonia Place, which included new houses rather than the public housing apartments that had been proposed by the Housing Authority years before, was created for the neighborhood by the city’s Department of Community Development and Housing. The neighborhood’s appearance had improved dramatically and its residents, at community gatherings and meetings of the Neighborhood Association, began to express new pride in their surroundings.

Connected to these plans was the work of the congregation of Wesley Memorial United Methodist Church, the largest and wealthiest white church in the city. Many members of this congregation had a long history in Macedonia because their families had owned the former furniture and textile plants located there. As part of their outreach ministry, the church decided to build a Childcare Center in the neighborhood. In both the city’s housing plans and the proposed Childcare Center plans, some residents were wary of what this new construction would mean for their neighborhood. Many feared that the proposed housing would be too expensive for them and many were unsure about whose children would be eligible for the childcare program. Once these concerns were expressed in neighborhood association meetings, the COPC Advisory Committee and the COPC Director worked hard to articulate the residents’ concerns to the city and the church. It was important to make certain that issues of fear and distrust were addressed by involving association members in the childcare planning process. Over time, with the residents’ input, the plans for the center changed to include not only the childcare program but also, in anticipation of the grant ending, to incorporate the COPC programs. Again, the neutrality of COPC staff and CSSI facilitated communication and began to assuage fears.

As a result of concerns about the imminent changes in the neighborhood, the idea of an oral history project began to take form. During a COPC Community Advisory Board meeting in 2001 that focused on the input of community residents' input into plans for the new Family Resource Center in Macedonia, attendees noted the many changes in the neighborhood over the years. The President of the Neighborhood Association stated that children who live in Macedonia today would not recognize the thriving community in which she grew up decades ago. Nonetheless, community pride and family connections remained part of Macedonia's culture both among some current residents and those who relocated to other parts of the city. She wished this could be captured and passed on to young people growing up in the neighborhood today.

Inspired by this discussion at the CAB meeting, an oral history project was developed to document and celebrate the rich history of the neighborhood. In the last months of COPC funding, thirty interviews with current and former residents were collected by community residents who were trained by an oral historian in interview techniques. Current residents and persons still living in the City of High Point were recruited to participate. A large community culminating event was held to present the highlights of the residents' stories in February 2003. Several current community leaders, such as the mayor and a radio talk show host, came forward to tell their stories of growing up in Macedonia. While they celebrated their memories and relationships, residents of the neighborhood noted that today Macedonia is on the cusp of another great period of change with the planning of the new housing construction, the building of the Family Resource Center, and greater attention to social needs in the area. In addition to being included in a booklet, this collection of stories was also used to develop a social studies curriculum for local public schools focusing on the impact of race relations, economic shifts, and deindustrialization during the mid-1900s. This project exemplified the importance of "listening" to the voices of the community and allowing the residents to set priorities.

## ***DISCUSSION***

The literature in community development suggests some ways in which to analyze the process of CSSI's role in Macedonia's revitalization. Christenson's typology (1989) includes three approaches used by community developers: *technical assistance*, *self-help*, and *conflict*. The initial approach used by CSSI in Stage I was clearly the *technical assistance* model where the university faculty and staff saw their role as objective consultants for the city of High Point. However, as staff and faculty became more acquainted with the residents and CSSI became drawn into a leadership role in the growing partnerships, a greater emphasis began to be placed on the *self-help* approach. In Stage II, CSSI staff learned to become facilitators to help the neighborhood identify its goals and strategies and build greater capacity to carry out certain projects. To the extent that some projects included originally in the HUD grant proposal were dropped in favor of those that residents promoted, a process of adaptation to the neighborhood's priorities occurred. Subsequently, in Stage III, CSSI stepped back into a supporting role in community building and accessing funding sources that the neighborhood could not obtain on its own. By this point, CSSI had learned a hard lesson—that planning programs without neighborhood leadership was wasteful and frustrating. Listening to and responding to residents' voices truly educated faculty, staff, and students in what was important to the neighborhood and thus, more likely to be sustained. They also realized that the relationships of trust and cooperation were the glue that held the partnerships together.

This case study of the relationship of UNCG and the Macedonia community in High Point also illuminates ways to overcome geographical barriers and traditional university-community tensions and provides insight into ways to develop trusting relationships between community residents and university personnel. High Point was not in UNCG's backyard and, at the beginning of this partnership, was not a community that had any prior connection to the University or its faculty. CSSI was a new creation, untested, with inexperienced leadership for university-community development collaborations. UNCG faculty and CSSI staff had virtually no connections or networks in place to develop initial collaborative projects. As time went on, staff conflicts and staff turnover in the city and CSSI had the potential to weaken the collaborations. The distance of a 30-minute commute to High Point kept some faculty and students from participating more extensively in the COPC and the neighborhood activities.

So, what made it work? First, the absence of a blueprint or research agenda made for greater openness and responsiveness to the wishes of the city staff and community members. Typically, in offering technical or research assistance, university or academic advice does not always prove to be tailored to the specific needs or expressed concerns of a local area. In the Macedonia case, the lack of topical expertise turned out to be a strength of the project. Listening and adapting to community needs emerged as a primary value of the project. CSSI also was forced to face its mistakes in writing the COPC proposal and develop a self-help approach as the neighborhood residents became more involved. Second, for High Point's city staff and residents, the University was seen as a welcome partner in this revitalization effort initially because of the successful writing of grants that brought resources into the city. Both the city department heads were outside professional planners who had been trained to try to engage the broader community more directly. The CSSI partners' involvement helped to assure that this process developed, and as a neutral player the university partners helped diminish the importance of the political road-blocks and egos. While some personality conflicts arose in the process, both sides became committed to moving the project forward with a clear focus on the revitalization goal. In particular, the city's community development staff recognized an opportunity to have a successful project that demonstrated broader public interest in improving low-income communities in High Point and worked to make this happen.

Third, the philosophy of resident self-help and engagement in the process developed as a key principle in the partnership and the revitalization project. The new housing proposal by the HPHA halfway through the brownfields project proved to be a critical event. It illustrated for both the academic and government partners that the community wanted to be involved in key decisions, rather than being left on the sidelines to ratify the decisions of elites. City staff, steering committee members, and the university participants learned from this event that although the residents might not want to be involved in large numbers in every decision about the neighborhood, they would demand participation in the plans when their interests and needs were directly affected. A neighborhood-based planning approach was even more visible in the COPC program over time as it created and implemented new activities that were more responsive to the Macedonia residents. In Stage III, the church's building plans were greatly influenced by the improved understanding of the role of the neighborhood in directing the plans. As a result the Family Resource Center was built to meet the community's wishes. Also, through the oral history project the neighborhood residents, other city residents and officials, and the

University shared joy in recounting the pride in Macedonia as *a neighborhood*. All understood the importance of being in relationship with each other.

In summary, university faculty and CSSI staff, along with those involved with the COPC, learned the importance of openness in becoming engaged with the residents of a distant community. The self-help approach took time to learn, but it developed much greater trust among the partners as residents began making more decisions. This experience taught the university personnel the importance of the development of genuine partnerships that transcend traditional ways of interacting among grassroots citizens, city leadership and university academics. Through this experience, as well as other community partnerships, CSSI developed the basic principle that, order to be effective, community collaborations have to include everyone affected in the decision making process.

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