

# The University of Winnipeg's Role as an Urban University

Occasional Paper No. 2

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By Robin H. Farquhar  
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The Institute of Urban Studies





THE UNIVERSITY OF  
WINNIPEG

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**THE UNIVERSITY OF WINNIPEG'S ROLE AS AN URBAN UNIVERSITY**

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The Institute of Urban Studies is an independent research arm of the University of Winnipeg. Since 1969, the IUS has been both an academic and an applied research centre, committed to examining urban development issues in a broad, non-partisan manner. The Institute examines inner city, environmental, Aboriginal and community development issues. In addition to its ongoing involvement in research, IUS brings in visiting scholars, hosts workshops, seminars and conferences, and acts in partnership with other organizations in the community to effect positive change.

THE UNIVERSITY OF WINNIPEG'S ROLE  
AS AN URBAN UNIVERSITY

Presented at  
The Institute of Urban Studies Symposium  
on "The University in the Inner City"  
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by

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Any university worth its salt is concerned with identifying and maximizing strengths which it possesses and on which it can base its quest for excellence -- its effort to become the best in the country at something. The University of Winnipeg possesses at least three such distinctive features:

- 1) It is relatively small in size, which means that its responsiveness is not fettered by multiple layers of bureaucracy to the same extent as can be the case in larger institutions;
- 2) Its academic scope covers a broad range of the liberal arts and sciences, but is unhampered by the narrow focus of specialization and dysfunctional inter-faculty competition that often characterize more comprehensive universities; and
- 3) It is located in the urban core of Canada's central major city.

Together, these distinctive features provide the unique base from which the University of Winnipeg can shape its pursuit of excellence.

We are pleased to be hosting this symposium during National Universities Week, because both its subject and its purpose are directly appropriate to one of our distinctive characteristics -- our urban setting. And I am happy to have this opportunity to explore briefly with you the University of Winnipeg's role as an urban university. What I propose to do is, first, to sketch the unique role of the urban university in general, and then to share with you some of

of the ways in which the University of Winnipeg is seeking to play that role here in our city.

### THE ROLE OF THE URBAN UNIVERSITY <sup>1</sup>

Much of what universities do is universal in nature: the pursuit of truth and excellence, the conservation and transmission of knowledge, and the development and transfer of technology are not typically limited by geographic bounds. Nevertheless, all universities influence the particular communities in which they are located. Some of these influences are unavoidable or unconscious; others are discretionary or intentional. Certain universities express a greater social consciousness and community-influence orientation than others, and the former pay particular attention in their planning and priority-setting to the ways in which their resources can be applied toward directly improving the quality of life in the communities where they reside.

This emphasis is especially important for universities located in communities where the needs for improvement are greatest - notably, the cores of our major urban centres. Here, the responsibility of public institutions to serve as catalysts for community renewal seems inescapable, and this responsibility may be exercised in a variety of ways that go well beyond what is required of those with more secluded, self-contained campuses that are not "downtown" (although many of them make significant contributions as well).

While all three of the university's typical functions (teaching,

research, and service) can be applied toward this end, it is through the service function that such a role is most directly expressed. This function includes, but is not limited to, the extension of the university's teaching activities and the demonstration and application of its research results. It is, as well, a distinct set of activities through which the university's diverse resources can be tapped explicitly for purposes of meeting community needs. This is not a simple matter. The university must have the wherewithal to supply the service (i.e., the necessary resources must be available and affordable), it must be uniquely able to offer the service (rather than competing with other agencies that may be more capable or suitable in this regard), and it must have criteria for selecting the services that it will deliver (to avoid conflict or duplication among its services, to maximize co-ordination of those services and their contributions to other university functions [including attention to possible generalization], and to maintain an overall positive or beneficial effect on the community). Such difficulties, however, represent challenges to be addressed, not reasons for neglect of the service function.

The university in the urban core should have no choice in this regard. If it possesses the requisite community-influence orientation, its teaching, research and service functions must be applied with particular focus on the urban context. Moreover, its community-service orientation will generate activities that are not expected of, or even possible for, most other institutions. It will influence the urban core as a major institution, as a university, and as a university with a community-influence orientation.

As a major institution, the "downtown" university influences the urban core economically: it is the direct employer of hundreds of individuals in the community, and should strive to provide employment for those desperately in need of it; it is the direct purchaser of goods and services from the community and should endeavour to "spread its business around" in the interest of balanced economic activity throughout the community; it is an indirect employer through the jobs created to produce the goods and services it requires; and it is an indirect stimulus to the economy through the purchase of goods and services by those whom it draws into the community to work, to learn, and to otherwise participate in its various activities. The institution is also a developer (constructing, renovating, buying, and selling buildings and lands); and it is a landlord (administering student residences, providing facilities for related activities [social service agencies, day-care centres, etc.], and managing properties which are owned by the university but occupied by others). In this role, it must avoid the label of "slum landlord" and contribute to the community's physical beautification through sensible architecture and sensitive landscaping.

As a university, the "downtown" institution contributes through its teaching function to the development of highly skilled manpower required by the city and to the social mobility of its citizens; it must pay special attention to the educational needs of groups found predominantly in the urban core - natives, ethnics, immigrants, senior citizens, handicapped persons and working adults - which means the development of curricular offerings particularly appropriate to such



groups and of delivery systems which provide teaching services at times and places that are reasonably accessible to them. The "downtown" university contributes through its research function by co-operating with the city's industries in technology transfer; by accepting contracts and consultancies to identify, analyze, and help resolve problems confronting the community; and by establishing centres and institutes oriented primarily according to urban problems and needs rather than to academic disciplines and norms. And it contributes through its service function by providing educational services (non-credit offerings for job training and general interest, conferences and visiting lecturers for special groups and the general public, and co-ordination of its activities with those of other relevant agencies in the core); by providing athletic, cultural and recreational services (not only in presenting its own talents and sponsoring those of noteworthies from outside the city for the entertainment and edification of local citizens, but also in granting access to its facilities so that community groups can foster and demonstrate their own athletic, cultural and recreational pursuits); by providing human and material services (access to use of clinical resources, library holdings, technical equipment, meeting space and the like; and by providing indirect services through the activities that its staff and students undertake independently in the interest of improving the quality of life in the urban core.

Beyond all of this, the urban university with a community-influence orientation will endeavour to exercise leadership. It will initiate action and create opportunities to provide the above kinds of programmes

and services, not simply wait for and respond to invitations or requests. It will serve as an active catalyst for positive change, as an exemplar to be emulated by others in the core area, and as a convenor of constructive coalitions. If the university does not provide such community leadership toward advancing and enriching the quality of life in the urban core, it will be "whipsawed" mercilessly by economic, political, and social forces that will render it helpless and, eventually, call into question its right to be called a university at all.

#### EMERGING RESPONSES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WINNIPEG

Let us turn now to a brief exploration of some of the ways in which the University of Winnipeg is currently striving to respond to the kinds of challenges that I have mentioned. Limitations of time require that I be selective, and I shall limit my summary to a few of our responses in the areas of economic development, capital development, and programme development, respectively.

The economic impact of the University of Winnipeg on its immediate community has recently been analyzed and it indicates the following for the 1982-83 fiscal year:

##### 1. Employment

- The University of Winnipeg employed a total of 775 persons in the 1982-83 fiscal year (461 full-time and 314 part-time and casual).
- As a multiplier effect, the University is also responsible for having created an additional 852 jobs in the local community.

- Total University of Winnipeg-created employment positions in Manitoba were therefore 1,627 during the 1982-83 fiscal year.

## 2. Consumer Spending by Faculty and Staff

- During the fiscal year 1982-83, the University of Winnipeg's total gross for salaries amounted to \$13.5 million.
- Total net salaries (after tax and other personal deductions) amounted to \$9.9 million.
- Based on Statistics Canada formula, the University employee salaries represented an \$8.6 million expenditure on the purchase of local goods and services; i.e., University employees' consumer spending amounted to some \$8.6 million in direct purchases during the 1982-83 fiscal year.

## 3. University Expenses on Goods and Services

- During the fiscal year 1982-83, the University of Winnipeg purchased more than \$2.8 million in goods and services from Manitoba suppliers.

## 4. Impact of Consumer Spending by Foreign and Non-Resident Students

- During the 1982-83 academic year, a total of 333 foreign students (visa) and 140 non-Manitoba students attended the University of Winnipeg.
- A University of Winnipeg survey indicates that foreign students and non-Manitoba residents respectively, each spend an average of \$8,266.00 and \$3,941.00, per academic

year each on the purchase of goods and services (including tuition fees, board and room, books, travel, etc.)

- Total consumer spending by foreign students and non-Manitoba students during the 1982-83 academic year was \$2.1 million and \$450,000, respectively, or about \$2.6 million in all.

5. Total University of Winnipeg Contribution to the Local Economy During the 1982-83 Fiscal Year

- In terms of cash-flow from the University of Winnipeg on salaries, purchase of goods and services, and buying power of foreign and non-Manitoba students, then, a direct infusion of \$14 million was contributed to our economy during the 1982-83 fiscal year.
- Overall, by way of grand total, the University of Winnipeg contributes more than \$29.4 million annually through the multiplier effect (2.1) of its employees' spending, University purchase of goods and services, and consumption by foreign and non-Manitoba students (i.e., the University of Winnipeg is responsible for contributing more than \$29.4 million per year to our economy).

While one might argue that some of this contribution may have been made whether or not the University were here, that possibility is counter-balanced by the fact that the figures I've cited do not include spending in the city by people who are not our students or staff members but who are drawn downtown by the numerous athletic and cultural events, conferences, and various non-credit learning activities that are held on

campus throughout the year. There can be no doubt that the University of Winnipeg contributes very significantly to the economic development of our city.

In regard to capital development, we believe that our plans are consistent with the needs of the urban community in which we reside. With reference to our present campus, we seek to beautify the community by providing and maintaining the only green space on the north side of Portage Avenue within Winnipeg's core area. Our "flagship" building, Wesley Hall, is a major historical landmark in the city and we are seeking funds to clean up and repair its external facing. Our most recently completed building, Centennial Hall, won an architect's award for design. And we have been successful in obtaining special government grants to renovate our facilities, both internally and externally, so that they can be made fully accessible to handicapped people.

In pursuing the objectives of beautification and accessibility, moreover, our efforts are not limited to our present campus. The new Athletic Centre in the block to the West should be a most attractive addition to the community, including a green park-like space near its entrance which is being supported through a fund-raising drive by our Alumni Association. The building has been designed so that it will be highly accessible to handicapped people and we hope, in fact, that it will become a major centre for their sports and recreational activities. In addition, the Athletic Centre will serve the community at large, not only in that it will provide the general public with opportunities to

view first-rate athletic competitions, but also in that it will be programmed co-operatively with community groups so that they may use its facilities for many of their own athletic and recreational endeavours. The same will be true of a second major building that we hope to construct within the next few years - a cultural centre for the performing arts in which the University's own theatrical and musical presentations can be performed along with those of important travelling troupes, and in which various ethnic and community groups can stage their own presentations as a means of fostering the special multicultural nature of our community. And we hope as well to obtain a third structural addition to our campus - a building to house a significantly expanded continuing education and community service function so that we can better respond to the rapidly growing learning needs of those in our urban community who are confronted with changing employment and personal conditions; in this regard, we are currently exploring the possible purchase of the Y.W.C.A. Building to the East of us along with other alternatives. This structure could also accommodate our new programme for inner-city child care workers (including a model day-care centre) and other urban-oriented training initiatives, our Institute of Urban Studies and selected other agencies with related purposes, and perhaps a Student Centre as well. It would be a University building that is very much in, of, and for this urban community; and we hope to "move" on it within the next year or so.

In regard to programme development, we are initiating a wide variety of activities designed to help meet the needs of urban Winnipeg through applying the various resources available to us. These initiatives

require that we surmount certain institutional obstacles that are characteristic of most universities. For example, in co-operation with our Faculty Association, we are developing work-load arrangements and reward systems that provide recognition and legitimacy to activities designed to serve our community. We are developing mechanisms that permit us to respond to problems and needs more rapidly than is possible with conventional academic programming which requires a long and convoluted process for approval prior to implementation. And we are establishing a number of ad hoc organizational structures which permit us to extend beyond the boundaries of traditional academic departments and mount multidisciplinary approaches to the resolution of urban problems that are, by definition, multidisciplinary in nature.

Prominent among these arrangements is the recent revitalization of our Institute of Urban Studies, the sponsoring agency for this symposium. The I.U.S. is developing plans for a variety of activities by which a wide range of academic and professional expertise can be co-ordinated and focused on the analysis and resolution of urban problems through programmes of research, consultation, publication and direct action; I hope you will have an opportunity to explore some of Dr. Artibise's exciting ideas in this regard. In addition, we are considering the establishment of a centre for the study of public policy and a centre to address the socio-psychological, economic and ethical implications of high technology in various organizations throughout the city. While these centres will provide service and training opportunities in direct response to relevant needs, they will also create

opportunities for the careful and objective analysis of various urban problems, studying them within the broader national and international milieus in which they arise; it is this latter function of such centres that renders them particularly appropriate in terms of the University's role.

In addition, there are a number of specific programmes and services that we intend to develop as reflections of our urban consciousness. Through our Continuing Education Division, we shall continue to place emphasis on the delivery of credit courses at times of the day and evening and in locations throughout the city that render them easily accessible to as many of Winnipeg's citizens as possible; and we are expanding our non-credit offerings in response to the special needs of minority groups and those who require retraining for employment. We are hoping to establish a Multicultural Resources Centre to help the city's ethnic groups record and preserve their distinctive histories, a Language Training Centre to help immigrants develop their linguistic skills so that they will have a fair chance in the labour market and a Native Education Centre to improve the chances for educational success of our Native population. We have already introduced a special summer-time language and cultural programme for students who come to us from other countries, a programme for training counsellors in the field of alcoholism, and a programme for preparing first-rate child care workers for inner-city day-care centres, of which there are more than seventy within a few blocks of our campus. Moreover, our Student Association has initiated a variety of activities to enrich the life



experience of both children and adults residing in the inner city - Project Praxis being the most noteworthy recent example; this is a summer-time endeavour through which university students provide a variety of community service, cultural, recreational and academic enrichment programmes for several hundred of the less advantaged Junior High School pupils in the city.

Finally, we recognize that we are not alone in seeking to improve the quality of life in downtown Winnipeg. We are pursuing a number of co-operative working relationships with social and cultural agencies (including the Art Gallery, the Museum of Man and Nature, and the Social Planning Council), with professional associations, with labour groups and with business organizations in the community. These relationships often result in non-credit programmes on campus that lead to certificates and diplomas which are recognized as important educational credentials. In addition, we have a direct interest in the work of the Core Area Initiative and the North Portage Development, contributing ideas to them and participating in their activities so that there will be coherence between our efforts and other major endeavours to upgrade downtown Winnipeg. In this regard, we encouraged the establishment of the new National Research Council Institute for Manufacturing Technology on the old St. Paul's site near our campus, and we look forward to various kinds of co-operation with that facility; for example:

- 1) Scholars in some of our Science and Mathematics Departments and in our Business Computing Programme will share mutual interests and hope to work closely with staff at the

Institute, along with our colleagues from the University of Manitoba;

- 2) Faculty members in several of our Humanities and Social Science Departments share an interest in studying the impact of high technology in our society and we believe that the location of the Institute here will provide some excellent opportunities for furthering those interests; and
- 3) We hope to become, in effect, the extension arm for the NRC Institute - that is, the delivery mechanism whereby the expertise of NRC scholars can be shared with groups of business leaders and policy makers in downtown Winnipeg as well as with the general public of our community.

In ways such as these, then, the University of Winnipeg will serve as a catalyst for change, a convenor of coalitions, and an intellectual leader in the urban renewal of Winnipeg - not as an aloof outsider but as an integral partner.

### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I must emphasize that the kinds of urban-serving activities I have outlined are not peripheral appendages to our traditional teaching and research functions. We shall continue pursuing excellence of instruction in the Liberal Arts and Sciences and research in the basic disciplines, as any good university must. But we recognize that the strong resources on which we rely for those functions are capable, in addition, of contributing more directly and immediately to

improving the quality of life in downtown Winnipeg. We intend to exploit this capability as fully as we can without jeopardizing the quality of our more conventional activities.

In this connection, it must never be forgotten that universities are essentially academic institutions, not social service stations, and it is in this fundamental distinctiveness that their greatest value to society lies. Universities located in urban cores must intensify their contacts with their communities, but they must at the same time retain their independence, objectivity, and capacity for constructive criticism if their potential for beneficial influence on the urban core is to be realized. Given that basic proviso, our reasons for wishing to exercise such influence are not simply charitable in nature; they are selfish as well: As our Vice-President Ross McCormack likes to say, "It's our neighbourhood."

## NOTES

1. This section is drawn in part from: Robin Farquhar, "The University's Influence on the Urban Core," University Affairs, Vol. 24, No. 8 (October, 1983), p. 32.

## I.U.S. PUBLICATIONS

### REPORTS

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