Put Universities to Work!

The Los Angeles region is home to many distinguished universities: UCLA, USC, UC Irvine, Cal State Northridge, Loyola, Occidental and many others. They may be public, private, secular or religious, and each occupies a niche in higher education. What they have in common is a deep bench of instructors, a public service orientation, and often public support.

These institutions can be your gateway to relevant community research as well as the faculty and students that undertake it. Not only are research universities important players in the policy formulation process, they can also be helpful to you in your neighborhood work - so knock on some doors!

Let me reassure those who may feel intimidated about approaching a university or its faculty. Universities embrace a broad social mission and are often explicit about their local service orientation. Tap these institutions for their brainpower to solve your community's problems!

Why You Should Take Advantage of Universities

Indeed universities make a commitment to serve the public good. They often receive generous tax breaks and other incentives, and public institutions are obligated to pay no local property tax at all. Have a look at their mission statement. UCLA, for example, is a top-tier public research university that supports the "creation, dissemination, preservation, and application of knowledge," according to its mission. It continues, "UCLA reaches beyond campus boundaries to establish partnerships *locally* and globally" (emphasis mine).

This is an invitation to ask the institution to put its money where its mouth is. When you're ready to pick up the phone or send an email, what you need to know at the outset is that universities are comprised of schools, each school with its own administration and budget. They pay very careful attention to their bottom line and all are run like corporations today. There is no longer a free lunch! So you may find yourself more successful at securing faculty face time or student help than financial or logistical support from the school itself.

That caveat aside, this brief overview will hopefully provide some insight into how your organization can make use of these brain trusts. They inform policy-makers, of course, and they can be of help to you too.

There are two issues to consider when approaching faculty: **time** and **topic**. In my experience, the difference between responsive and less-responsive faculty comes down to their time. The busiest among them have the least time (and can be impatient, as students

know well). But everyone is more or less concerned about community welfare, so it's worth making the approach.

◇ **DEPARTMENT** *of* **URBAN PLANNING** ◇

UP Home
Faculty
News
Events
Chair's Message
40th Anniversary Celebration

ABOUT THE DEPARTMENT

The UCLA Department of Urban Planning is at the intersection of unique academic, regional, geographic, and professional resources that creates a learning environment unlike any other. Los Angeles, one of the most culturally diverse and exciting urban settings in the world, serves as a unique laboratory for faculty and students to study and solve urban issues and problems. The world-class faculty in the department —nationally and internationally recognized scholars and leaders in community development, environmental planning, housing, land development, regional and international development, transportation, and urban design—prepare master's and doctoral degree students to address the social, economic, and spatial relationships that shape society.

And there is the topic. This is where your search for help must be nuanced. First have a look first at the department mission (left). Be warned: this may not tell you much. Schools with a professional orientation (like a policy or planning school) use curricula that reflect accreditation standards, so there is some consistency across mission statements. So have a look at the faculty pages.

Is the faculty member's interest area complimentary with your issue? Some emphasize social justice in their research, for example. Perhaps they focus on mass transit accessibility in economically disadvantaged communities. At other schools, faculty may take a market-oriented approach to transit and focus on efficiency. Each may inform your understanding. In an email, suggest how their research fits your problem. Faculty interest is the driver of commitment, so have a look at their bio for details (right).

Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris
Professor of Urban Planning
Urban Planning

Ph.D. in Urban and Regional Planning, University of Southern California

Email: sideris@ucla.edu

Phone: (310) 206-9679 x 69679

BIO:
Professor Loukaitou-Sideris' research focuses on the public environment of the city, its physical representation, aesthetics, social meaning and impact on the urban resident. Her work seeks to integrate social and physical issues in urban planning and architecture. An underlying theme of her work is its "user focus"; that is, she seeks to analyze and understand the built environment from the perspective of those who live and work there.

Dr. Loukaitou-Sideris' research includes documentation and analysis of the social and physical changes that have occurred in the public realm; cultural determinants of design and planning and their implications for public policy; quality of life issues for inner city residents; transit security; and urban design and transportation issues.

Publications are Key

Next look closely at publications because they are the key to understanding their focus (below). If a faculty member's publications do not fit with your topical concerns, then look elsewhere.

SPPD Faculty

Tridib Banerjee
Anthony Bertelli
Hilda Blanco
Raphael Bostic
Hilary B
Gerald
Richard F. Callahan
Terry L. Cooper

Juliet Ann Musso
Associate Professor, Director, Graduate Programs in Public Policy and Management

Expertise
Biographical Sketch

Publications
Musso, J. "Community Networks and Power in Los Angeles: Implementation of Neighborhood Governance Reform"; in Eva Sorensen and Gunnar Gjelstrup (Eds.), Public Administration in Transition, McGill Queens publisher, festschrift to honor Peter Bogason of Roskilde University; Forthcoming

Director, Graduate Programs in Public Policy and Management
Dowell Myers
Professor
Director, Population Dynamics Research Group
Co-Director, Center for the Study of Immigrant Integration
Robert C. Myrtle
Professor

Say you are interested in your renter community's lack of access to affordable transit, or alternative transit options like minibuses. UCLA's planning program, known for a social orientation, warrants a first look. By the same token, the USC School of Policy, Planning & Development's planning program (my alma mater) is well-regarded too, and conducts large-scale transportation studies. So call over there as they will likely have expertise in your topic area.

You can also infer difference in orientation depending on how these programs are situated in the university. At UCLA, for example, planning is nested inside the School of Public Affairs; at USC, planning is grouped with

development in the School of Policy, Planning & Development.

Establishing Contact & Generating Interest

OK - now that you've identified a few possible candidates for helping your organization, how to proceed? Your best approach is to send an introductory email discussing your interest in their research. Suggest how their work might be helpful to your community, and be prepared to frame your issue with a summary description. If meeting in person, be sure to bring with you a hardcopy (faculty like to read, and they like paper). Describe your objectives clearly so that they know what you're asking of them.

If you do drop an email and don't get a response in a few days, follow up and then give a call to remind them. If Professor Impatient is not responsive, try approaching him or her with a referral from another, preferably senior, faculty member. They extend courtesy to each other like medical doctors and attorneys.
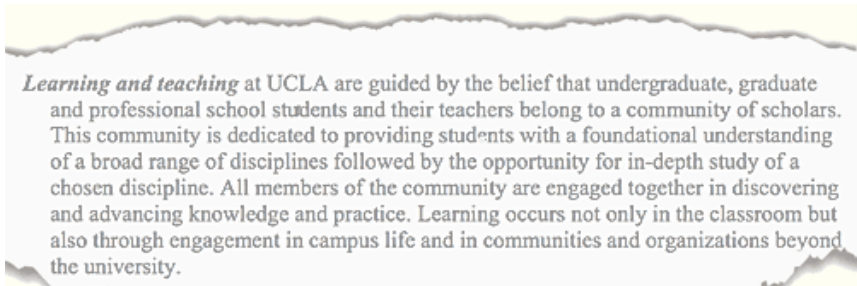
I have yet to meet a faculty member who is not sympathetic to community needs and genuinely motivated by interesting issues. If you do hook them, they might be willing to assign a graduate student to the problem. (Most faculty members work with graduate students on research in an apprentice-type arrangement.) Faculty are also in a position to recommend interesting, long-term research problems to advanced students. If the faculty member is *really* interested, she might work up a grant application to bankroll the research. A grant award secures commitment.

Universities are very competitive! They want their faculty publishing key research. Nothing will hook the interest of an ambitious new faculty hire more than a grant and a chance to publish on a hot community topic. Your partnership with another community organization will come in handy here because community-oriented research is very appealing to foundation funders.

Find appropriate university contacts through the media relations office. Faculty work hard and enjoy presenting their research to the media. Media relations gets these folks out there. Call to ask about faculty experts for your topic area. (Even if you're not offering a photo-op, you can ask a faculty member to discuss their community research in your organization's newsletter.) The office should put you in touch with someone who is knowledgeable and receptive.

Keep in Mind the Availability of Interns (i.e. Free Labor)

Schools manufacture professionals like widgets; incoming students are the raw material. Today they are expected to learn in a real-world setting while they take their degree, and there is no reason why your

Learning and teaching at UCLA are guided by the belief that undergraduate, graduate and professional school students and their teachers belong to a community of scholars. This community is dedicated to providing students with a foundational understanding of a broad range of disciplines followed by the opportunity for in-depth study of a chosen discipline. All members of the community are engaged together in discovering and advancing knowledge and practice. Learning occurs not only in the classroom but also through engagement in campus life and in communities and organizations beyond the university.

organization would not offer a valuable learning opportunity, right?

Internships are part of the process at every professional school (highlighted on the USC site at left). Call the professional development office and say you have an opportunity to bring an intern on staff, and would the school be interested in partnering on recruitment? Is there a program director that might be an appropriate contact?

There is one more valuable opportunity area to explore: capstone course projects. When I was at USC, some of our professional programs had a capstone project requirement that assigned students to real clients to research real problems. Perhaps you have a pressing social problem that would benefit from student attention? If you can partner with a community organization you stand a good chance of getting in the door. So ask whether their program has a capstone class that assigns student(s) to community projects. If you run into resistance, keep in mind the university's mission to do good for the world. Allude to it.

In Conclusion....

In closing, let me be clear on one important point. A poorly conceived question or an inquiry irrelevant to the faculty member's area of research will not be rewarded. So be prepared going in: value their time as a courtesy; hook them with a problem that speaks to their research area; and be prepared to ask what your next step should be if they cannot help you. A for a referral, perhaps, or a pointer to a community organization that may be able to help. Good luck! TP