



FIGURE 1—Expected Age at Death for Those Aged 40 Years by Income Percentile in the United States

site provides an extensive set of commuting zone and county-level characteristics that were collected as part of the recently published study. The data are available in Excel spreadsheets and Stata format.

To encourage follow-up research using these data, we are creating a small network of investigators who will study these

questions (and others) using our data on local area life expectancies by income group. Through an open application process, we plan to make six research support awards for follow-up investigations using the new data to study the determinants of the relationship between income and life expectancy and implications for

interventions and policy. Projects discussing implications of mortality differentials for key policy questions, such as the distributional effects of Social Security, are especially encouraged. To the extent possible, we will link new data used in these follow-up studies to the existing data on our Web site to create a rich online repository of data related to

Engaging Urban Universities as Anchor Institutions for Health Equity

The extreme poverty, persistent deprivation, and pernicious racism afflicting communities in the shadows of powerful, relatively wealthy urban universities raise troubling moral issues, as well as questions about higher education's contribution to the public good. It is essential that universities as key anchor institutions significantly and effectively contribute to radically reducing the pervasive, ongoing,

seemingly intractable problems of our inner cities, including the complex, multicausal problem of health inequity.¹

A recent *New York Times* article highlighted conditions in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and Cleveland, Ohio, the sites of the 2016 Democratic and Republican National Conventions, respectively, as examples of a more general phenomenon of urban inequality:

In 2014, Philadelphia had the highest poverty rate (26 percent) among cities with more than a million people, while Cleveland has the third-highest poverty rate (39.2 percent)

health and inequality to facilitate further work.

We invite interested researchers to apply for funding support from this program at this Web site: www.nber.org/programs/ag/funding.html. The application deadline is February 1, 2017. Award recipients will be announced on February 15 for awards beginning March 1, 2017.

There are few health care issues more important than working to ensure that all Americans benefit from economic, social, and technological progress that offers the promise of improved health and longevity. These new data, and the research that follows from them, can contribute to making this goal a reality. **AJPH**

Raj Chetty, PhD
David Cutler, PhD
Michael Stepner, BA

CONTRIBUTORS

The authors contributed equally to this article.

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among cities with more than 100,000 residents.²

The article goes on to note that “[t]oday, both cities rely on ‘eds and meds’—educational and medical institutions—as engines for jobs and growth.”² Philadelphia, in fact, has one of the highest concentrations of anchor institutions, with “eds and

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ira Harkavy is with the Barbara and Edward Netter Center for Community Partnerships, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

Correspondence should be sent to Ira Harkavy, Associate Vice President, Founding Director, Barbara and Edward Netter Center for Community Partnerships, University of Pennsylvania, 111 S 38th St, Second Floor, Philadelphia, PA 19104-3465 (e-mail: harkavy@upenn.edu). Reprints can be ordered at <http://www.ajph.org> by clicking the “Reprints” link.

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meds” representing 12 of the 15 largest private employers, and the Philadelphia metropolitan area contains more than 100 colleges and universities.³

STATE OF UNIVERSITY–COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

A burgeoning higher education democratic civic and community engagement movement has developed in part as a response to these pervasive problems. Service learning, community-based participatory research, volunteer projects, and community economic development initiatives are some of the means that have been used to create mutually beneficial partnerships designed to make a positive difference in the community and on campus. Academic medical centers have also increasingly focused attention and resources on community engagement, although it is a relatively new activity for many.⁴ But these efforts, although they are important, generally fall far short of what is required.

An urban university’s interaction with its local community might usefully be placed within the following four categories:

1. Gentrification and displacement of low-income residents,
2. Disregard and neglect,
3. Partially engaged (frequently indicated by involvement of the academic or the institutional–corporate component of the university, but not both),
4. Truly engaged (involving comprehensive, significant, serious, and sustained

involvement of all aspects of the university with the community).

I am, of course, arguing for the development of truly engaged universities, in which a very high priority is given not only to significantly improving the quality of life in the local community, but also to working with the community respectfully, collaboratively, and democratically. In addition, helping to develop and implement solutions to strategic, community-identified local problems functions as a curriculum, text, and performance test for a truly engaged university’s research, teaching, and learning activities. No urban university, as far as I can tell, presently meets these criteria.

TWO PROMISING EXAMPLES

Nonetheless, progress has occurred over the past 30 or so years with an increasing number of universities taking meaningful, if insufficient, steps in the right direction. Because I know it best, I will briefly focus on the University of Pennsylvania, which has been recognized as a leader for its involvement with West Philadelphia, its local geographic community. Since the mid-1980s, Penn has developed academically based community service courses in which service is rooted in and intrinsically tied to research, teaching, and learning, and in which the goal of the course is to contribute to structural community improvement, such as effective public schools. In 2014 to 2015, 49 faculty members taught more than 1600 Penn students (undergraduate,

graduate, and professional) who participated in academically based community service courses, working primarily in university-assisted community schools in West Philadelphia.

Penn’s Economic Inclusion Program engages local, minority, and women-owned businesses and residents in the University’s economic activity. In fiscal year 2015, for example, Penn spent \$122 million with West Philadelphia–based businesses (approximately 13.07% of total purchasing of goods and services), and Penn and its Health System hired 1572 local residents (47.5% of all new hires).⁵ University City District (a partnership among West Philadelphia “eds and meds,” small businesses, and residents) has trained over 600 local residents for jobs at Penn and other local anchor institutions since 2010 (with 90% of last year’s graduates connected to employment) through its West Philadelphia Skills Initiative.⁶ Although these and other academic and institutional efforts are indicators of genuine progress, Penn still has a long way to go to comprehensively and effectively engage and align its various components and substantial resources in democratic, sustained, mutually beneficial partnerships with its community.

To cite another promising example, in Newark, New Jersey, with a poverty rate between Philadelphia’s and Cleveland’s, Rutgers University–Newark developed a strategic plan in 2014 focused on an anchor institution agenda. This agenda involves the integration of academic and economic resources to address five major areas:

1. building strong educational pathways (pre-K through 16) for increased postsecondary attainment;

2. strong, healthy, and safe neighborhoods;
3. promoting and leveraging the arts and culture;
4. science and the urban environment; and
5. entrepreneurship and economic development.

Two examples of work now under way include the Newark City of Learning Collaborative, a coalition of more than 60 cross-sector partners co-convened and supported by the University that aims to raise the college attainment rate in Newark from 17% to 25% by 2025; and the Safer Newark Council, a public–private–nonprofit working group convened by the Office of the Mayor, Rutgers University–Newark, and local corporate and philanthropic leaders that is implementing an evidence-based, city-wide public safety strategy.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

These promising examples, as well as others, have made progress in the face of significant obstacles that impede the development of truly engaged universities. These obstacles include intellectual and institutional fragmentation, commercialism and commodification, a discipline-based faculty reward system, and the legacy of the Ivory Tower. The really hard and important question is, what specifically is to be done to reduce these and other obstacles to full-hearted and full-minded university engagement with local communities? My answers, alas, are much too general and lack a concrete implementation strategy. But here they are nonetheless.

Government at all levels should be called on to support higher education–community partnerships that demonstrate genuine community benefit, not simply benefit to the college or university, as well as transparent and democratic collaborations with local partners. In effect, support would be based on the “Noah principle”—funding given for building arks (producing real change), not for predicting rain (describing the problems that exist and that will develop if actions are not taken).

Democratic-minded academics across schools, fields, and disciplines should work together to create and sustain a global movement dedicated to transforming universities, particularly urban universities, into truly engaged anchor institutions dedicated to developing and sustaining democratic community partnerships designed to advance knowledge and significantly improve the quality of life in communities.

To conclude by placing my argument in a larger context, I turn to the work of the great American philosopher and educator John Dewey, who famously wrote: “Democracy must begin at home, and its home is the neighborly community.”^{7(p213)} In effect, I am updating Dewey and advocating the following proposition: democracy must begin at home, and its home is the truly engaged neighborly university and its local community partners. **AJPH**

Ira Harkavy, PhD

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