

# BRINGING STUDENTS TO THE NEIGHBORHOODS

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Susan B. Hyatt, IUPUI, Department of Anthropology

In Spring 2010, I was thrilled to open an email message Indiana Campus Compact, notifying me that I had been chosen as that year's winner of the Hiltunen Award for Outstanding Contribution to the Scholarship of Engagement. This was, needless to say, a great honor for me but even more importantly, it was validation that the time I had

spent, working collaboratively with students and with community-based organizations in Indianapolis, was recognized and valued by others.

I had made my way to my PhD through something of an unorthodox path. From 1979-1981, I was in the PhD program in Anthropology at the University of Michigan, one of the top departments in the country. But, something didn't feel right to me about the fit. Like many anthropologists, particularly those of us who were trained in the 1970s, our notions of what it meant to be an anthropologist invariably involved traveling to remote corners of the world where we would undergo the magical process of immersion in another cultural setting that would somehow transform us into real anthropologists. And yet, as we moved into the 1980s, living in Michigan and seeing the collapse of Detroit and the US auto industry, the movement of immigrant labor into new parts of the country, and the growing power of the women's and gay rights movements, I found myself more drawn to being involved in American politics and urban issues at home.

So, in the fall of 1981, I packed my bags and headed for Chicago, where I was hired as a community organizer, working in troubled neighborhoods in the southwest part of the city. And, when I eventually did return to graduate school to finish my PhD, I headed this time to the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, a department that had long emphasized the importance of anthropological fieldwork in western contexts. I conducted my dissertation fieldwork in a deindustrialized former mill town in northern England, among women who were fighting to better their conditions in their deteriorating public sector housing developments (council estates), located at the periphery of the urban core. And, when I began my teaching career, having been profoundly touched by my encounters with grassroots movements, I vowed to myself that I would involve my students in work in such settings, where they could see for themselves the power of qualitative research, not only as a transformative experience for them as students but for community members as well.

When I joined the faculty at IUPUI in winter 2005, I was particularly delighted to have come to an institution that was nationally known for its commitments to service learning and civic engagement. As soon as I familiarized myself with the city and its neighborhoods, I began taking my Ethnographic Methods classes out of the classroom and into the community to carry out projects that involved community mapping, interviewing, archival research and scanning residents' photos and other memorabilia to be used for a range of research projects.

The Indiana Campus Compact, located as it is right on IUPUI's campus, is an important element of the institutionalization of such activities at IUPUI. In 2010, I was recognized in particular for a project I had done with students on the Eastside of the city (in Warren Township), in a neighborhood called Community Heights that was in the process of fashioning a new identity for itself. Together with the Community Heights Neighborhood Organization, and with the help of funding from the Indianapolis Neighborhood Resource Center, the Solution Center at IUPUI and Justus Homes, the students pulled together their research into a small book entitled, *Eastside Story: Portrait of a Neighborhood on the Suburban Frontier*. Thanks to our funders, we were able to distribute 1,000 copies of the book to the community free of charge. The students not only had the excitement of having their research compiled into a book; several of them also published additional reflections about this experience in scholarly venues. In the fall of 2010, two of those students, Daniel Branstrator and Margaret Baurley, published a short article called "Notes from the City" in a monthly column of our professional newsletter, *Anthropology News*. And, in fall of 2011, Margaret and another student, Molly Dagon, wrote short essays that appeared in the journal, *Collaborative Anthropologies*.

Through our work on *Eastside Story* and other endeavors, I have been able to realize my professional goals of bringing my students "to the field," and of bringing our discipline to community residents. Such ventures are time-consuming and labor-intensive; but, they are well worth it for the opportunities they offer us to professionalize our students, and for what our students gain from such experiences. I am grateful to the Indiana Campus Compact for supporting this work and for creating an environment on our campus where the community and the campus can truly be equal partners in this greatest adventure of all that we call "education."