

THE C.D. ALTERNATIVE

mixed media studies

by Vera Radio

Few people know that the University of Alberta pioneers the field in Canada for the study of Community Development. The Community Development Program, now in its fifth year, is unique in other ways: it seeks to apply the social sciences; it has no full-time academic staff except for the program's co-ordinator; it is an interdisciplinary Master's program and there is no equivalent undergraduate program.

A few universities in the United States and England have comparable programs in Community Development (C.D.). The coming year will see the establishment of an undergraduate C.D. program at Memorial University in Newfoundland. That still leaves the U of A with the only graduate program in Canada.

But what is Community Development? I asked some of the students in the program. Gordon Chutter said it involved the processes of "citizen participation" and "social intervention". For Vish Suparsad C.D. meant "people, change, justice, equality, and love". That's alot to live up to!

CD IS POWER

Drew Lamont sees two main aspects to Community Development. "The first is power. C.D. is a method or a tool for organizing the disenfranchised and powerless elements of society so that they increase their power over events affecting them. The second aspect of community development is a more spiritual side; C.D. is a process that seeks to foster more rewarding and fulfilling relationships among groups of people."

Glen Eyford, co-ordinator of the program, sees the job of



Community development student learns to use video-tape as a community involvement technique.

is a specialist and nobody understands what is happening. He says, "society does not present its problems in neat disciplinary packages. The traditional academic favors the medieval departmentalization of the university, but we need to look at the whole of society. The C.D. worker needs to ask 'why'."

"To me, Community Development means understanding. It's understanding the whirlpool so I won't be taken in by it. The whirlpool can be monopolies, big business, big industry, big government, whatever! We need to have some defense against progress."

How does the program create generalists who understand what is going on? The interdisciplinary nature of the program is the primary vehicle. Students can take their courses from virtually any

comprise one-third of a student's load.

While conceptual knowledge is provided largely through courses, students develop practical skills during the 4 month summer internship. As well, students may enroll in practicum courses during the academic year. Usually such a course would involve working with a government department or social agency in a community related project. Individual study courses exist and students are urged to use them in a creative way—either to obtain experientially based learning or to supplement special academic interests which are not provided for in other courses.

The thesis is the central focus of a student's learning. Practical theses, which have direct relevance to problems being faced by society are encouraged.

PETITION

In fact one of the main impulses responsible for starting this C.D. program came from the community. Education and agriculture groups, as well as various government departments, petitioned the University because of the need.

The other push came from twelve university departments that got together to explore human resource development, social development and community development. A survey taken in 1969 indicated that the people engaged in community development in Alberta numbered 200. A definite need for a training program existed.

"When we started five years ago, we had no sharp focus on what C.D. was," says Glen Eyford, program co-ordinator. "With the aid of students and graduates, more opportunities are available to define C.D. Now more options are open to students and there are more possibilities for field experience. We know more clearly the kind of work needed to be done."

In keeping with the interdisciplinary nature of the program, students come from a variety of undergraduate backgrounds. Marg Johnson taught for a couple of years, worked with the YMCA as a community secretary and received a diploma in counselling before she decided to enter the program. She appreciates, "the freedom to integrate courses, to explore and to build on special interests. The small department stimulates much student-staff interaction. I feel involved in

this program, because the internal structure allows me to influence decisionmaking."

PREVENTIVE NOT CURATIVE

Gordon Chutter completed a B.A. in psychology and became interested in Community Development because of a "desire to work on the preventive rather than the curative side. Also, a desire to approach social problems holistically, rather than individually, and a desire to work with the client, as opposed to working for the client." He feels a balance in the "why" of community development (i.e. ethics, philosophy), as well as in the "how" of community development. (i.e. methods, techniques), as essential. Being able to take courses in both satisfies his need.

Eileen English originally hoped to do social work, but soon became disenchanted with the social work attitudes and practices. At present she finds the Community Development Program more theoretical than originally anticipated. "I expected more skills," she commented.

RESOURCE DEPLETION

Vish Suparsad, a black South African, studied sociology and political science in

Saskatoon.

He says, "I became concerned with issues like resource depletion of the world, monopoly of expertise, centralization of capital in certain parts of the world... The interdisciplinary program of community development presented itself as a reasonable field of study to become acquainted with development at a grass roots level."

STRATEGY FOR CHANGE

He recognizes C.D. as one strategy for change towards justice and equality. He feels the program at present has many gaps, but that it is not static. "The structure of representation on governing bodies of the program allows for reasonable dialogue between faculty and students."

Since the student body is limited to about thirty, preference is given to students who have had experience related to community development. Other admissions criteria are academic excellence and academic background, letters of support, and a written personal statement indicating why this field of study was chosen.

At present all graduates of the program are employed in work related to community development. Some are working in urban planning, some in rural development, others with Indian and Metis agencies and a few as staff members for CUSO and CYC. "Future employment prospects appear good," commented Eyford, "as more agencies and organizations are defining a development role for which they need someone skilled in the process of development."

What kinds of problems does the co-ordinator see with the program? Glen Eyford says the first is maintaining interest in the interdisciplinary idea. "It starts off with a bang, but soon the members feel the pull of the home department, especially when their budget calls. Budget strength is another important problem. We need to be able to buy staff and resources to keep the program truly interdisciplinary."

CHARITABLE DONATION

"Right now Community Development courses are being taught by staff drawn from several departments through charitable donations. However, Eyford feels the day of reckoning has now come. "The university is taking a hard line on budgets. Charitable contributions from other departments may not be forthcoming next year. We want the University to recognize formally what has been done informally by granting funds to purchase staff for core courses."

If research funds were available, he would like to see study done on social problems such as the impact of communications technology on the kind of life in communities, alternative methods of organization for citizen participation in the community, the design of self-help projects for native people in the Yukon.

Perhaps Marg Johnson's words aptly describe the program, "It's satisfactory in many ways, but it is suffering growing pains. Its full potential has not yet been reached."



Glen Eyford, co-ordinator: "Society does not present its problems in neat disciplinary packages." photo by R. Luck

the C.D. worker as helping communities to understand what is going on and helping them do something about it. This involves working with groups of people as they seek to make decisions, solve problems, create policy and take action in a variety of social, economic, cultural, and educational development programs. The community developer needs to possess conceptual and practical skills and he needs to be a generalist.

According to Eyford, this is crucial, because today everyone

department on campus. In this way, Glen Eyford feels any student interest can be accommodated, whether it be rural, urban, local, international, or in the social planning realm. "However, there must be provision for integration and synthesis and not just a smorgasbord of courses," says Eyford. "This C.D. program is beginning to synthesize, largely because of student unrest and agitation." The core courses in Community Development attempt to fill this need and



After studying all through night, what could one expect?