

# **Social Capital Theory and the Metropolitan University: Reframing Ideas about Neighborhood Interactions**

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## **Abstract**

*The idea that social relations can aggregate into social capital has intuitive appeal that scholars are finding useful as they seek to explain variations in community outcomes. This article suggests that it may be time for metropolitan university administrators to begin thinking beyond community relations or community engagement as they seek to influence what is going on in the neighborhoods that surround their campuses. Social capital may be an untapped resource in their midst.*

Situated in high-density residential and commercial areas, metropolitan universities are surrounded by and must operate in diverse and dynamic social environments. What happens off campus affects the lives of students, faculty, and staff on campus. A shift in popularity among downtown neighborhoods can change the residential composition of a community. The bankruptcy or relocation of a major institution can reshape the commercial landscape. Even subtle changes over time, such as increasing suburbanization, decreasing public transportation, or perceptions of safety, will have effects. In such a complex web of interrelationships, providing a campus environment that is conducive to teaching and learning can mean actively working to influence off-campus affairs, and doing this requires resources. One intangible resource that may warrant more attention is social capital, which grows out of social relations and social structure and has been argued to affect neighborhood stability (Temkin and Rohe 1998), economic development (Woolcock 1998), public safety (Putnam 2000; Rosenfeld, Messner, and Baumer 2001), health (Giles et al. 2005; Putnam 2000) and education (Coleman 1988; Putnam 2000).

The idea that social relations can aggregate into social capital has intuitive appeal. Some individuals are known for being particularly adept at developing relationships within and across groups and getting things done. They accomplish with others what would have been unlikely in isolation. Social capital theory encourages thinking of interpersonal connections as resources or capital much like economic, human, or physical capital. The idea has garnered serious attention only in the last twenty-five years and has grown to be quite popular, although some remain skeptical (Arrow 2000; DeFilippis 2001; Hero 2003). As happens with new concepts, debates over value and definition emerge and can be quite disparate. Social capital has been defined differently, but as Nan Lin (2000b, 24) pointed out, scholars “share the understanding

that social capital consists of resources embedded in social relations and social structure, which can be mobilized when an actor wishes to increase the likelihood of success in a purposive action.” In this sense, social capital is like other forms of capital in that it exists to a greater or lesser degree and can accumulate and be exploited by purposeful actors. University administrators charged with driving outcomes may want to consider whether thinking in such conceptual terms would be useful as they attempt to shape the communities that surround their campuses.

Thinking in broader terms about resources in a community may lead university administrators to discover untapped wealth in their midst. Alternatively, it may point to the need for coordinating different community and university activities. Instead of seeking only to engage the community, suggesting interaction between individuals on campus and individuals in the community, administrators may want to think about how they might also influence the extent to which individuals in the community are interacting with one another. This article explores the relevance of social capital theory to the plight of the metropolitan university and is designed to initiate conversation about the potential value of the concept to university administrators. In the paragraphs to follow, social capital is discussed as a concept, with attention given particularly to what it is, how it grows, and how it has been shown to be valuable. It then looks at the case of one Midwestern higher education institution, The University of Akron, which is actively involved in efforts to revitalize the area surrounding its campus.

## **Social Capital as a Concept**

Social capital has an interesting conceptual history. It emerged initially along two distinct paths and then disappeared from use by 1921. More than sixty years passed before it was used again in any systematic way, though brief references are found in Jacobs (1961) and Loury (1977). It is not clear whether the two scholars who reintroduced it in the 1980s (Bourdieu, 1980, 1983, 1986; Coleman, 1987a, 1987b, 1988; Coleman and Hoffer, 1987) were aware of the early uses of the term or even of each others' writings. In a conceptual history of social capital, James Farr (2004) traced the first use of the concept to a group of nineteenth-century political economists. Henry Sidgwick (1883), Karl Marx (1967 [1894]), Edward Bellamy (1897), John Bates Clark (1899) and Alfred Marshall (1890) generally used the term to distinguish between individually possessed versus community-possessed physical capital (e.g., a farmer's equipment or tools versus the roads and bridges leading to the village market). Although interest has been expressed in returning to this conceptualization (DeFilippis 2001), the contemporary view of social capital comports with the term as it emerged from the second path uncovered by Farr. He found that John Dewey (1900) wrote about reading, writing, and arithmetic as tools for the individual but also as keys necessary to unlocking “the wealth of social capital” that exists beyond an individual's limited experience. Dewey went on to use the term several more times in a similar context, according to Farr, but he never went to the trouble of defining it, instead leaving the reader to deduce from the context what he meant by the term.

A fellow educator and contemporary of Dewey's provided the first clear definition of social capital. West Virginia school superintendent L. J. Hanifan (1916) wrote about social capital as "good will, fellowship, sympathy, and social intercourse among the individuals and families who make up a social unit" (1916, 130). To Hanifan the individual who comes into contact with his neighbor, and through his neighbor with other neighbors, will accumulate social capital "which may immediately satisfy his social needs and which may bear a social potentiality sufficient to the substantial improvement of living conditions in the whole community" (1916, 130). Hanifan's and Dewey's usage captures the importance of associational life that Alexis de Tocqueville wrote about almost a century earlier (1838) and is consistent with how the concept has come to be understood today, but Hanifan's publication in 1916 is the last known systematic use of the concept until the 1980s.

Pierre Bourdieu and James Coleman defined social capital in considerable detail and have provided the basis for the concept as it is understood today. Bourdieu (1986) defined social capital as the aggregate of resources available to individuals in a group by nature of being part of a group. The extent of one's social capital, according to Bourdieu, depends on the size of one's network and the resources possessed by individuals in that network. Coleman recognized that resources accessible through a network of individuals are important, but he placed special value on the norms and relationships that can emerge from group interaction. He defined social capital as networks, norms, and relationships (1987a; 1987b; 1988; Coleman and Hoffer 1987) and by its function.

It is not a single entity but a variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors—whether persons or corporate actors—within the structure. Like other forms of capital, social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible. (1988, S98)

Coleman wrote about obligations, expectations, trust, information channels, and norms emerging from social relations and facilitating action, and thus constituting social capital.

The conceptual debate that remains unresolved turns on whether social capital is simply resources available through networks, as Bourdieu suggests, or whether it is networks and the norms and relationships emerging from them, which Coleman describes. Despite this disagreement and claims that social capital has taken on a "circus-tent quality" (De Souza Briggs 1997), the value of the concept remains undiminished to many scholars. University administrators who recognize untapped value in their communities would do well to consider whether thinking in terms of varying levels of social capital might be a useful frame for analysis and planning. Evidence shows higher levels of social capital exist where individuals are more closely connected. And, although social capital is like other forms of capital in that it can produce unintended outcomes (Hanifan 1916) and undesirable outcomes (Lin 2000a; Portes and Landolt 1996), research has shown that many positive benefits emerge in

high-social-capital environments (Putnam 2000). In some communities, facilitating the growth of social capital may prove to be more useful than finding ways to generate additional financial capital to improve physical infrastructure.

## **How Social Capital Grows**

Social capital grows out of interactions between individuals, and two places where scholars have theorized the most about such interactions are in the family and in the formal or informal groups in a community. (Given this paper's focus and space limitations, discussion of social capital in the family is omitted.) Formal groups can be thought of as clubs or associations, whereas informal groups are more like collections of friends, coworkers, or neighbors who socialize together. Emphasis on face-to-face interactions and groups has been the focus of most research, although scholars are beginning to examine the effects of online networks such as MySpace and Facebook. The discussion of how social capital grows begins with Bourdieu and Coleman, who suggest different ways of thinking about this resource.

Bourdieu's ideas (1986) about the value of networks are consistent whether the networks are familial or non-familial. Individuals who are connected to others through networks potentially have access to the resources of others, assuming those in the network are willing to share or trade. Political scientist Robert Putnam talks specifically about the importance of reciprocity in networks (Putnam 2000; Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti 1993). Networks, to Bourdieu, are a means of accessing resources, and some common resources that individuals will seek through network connections are knowledge, skills, money, and even other individuals with access to these and other resources of value.

In distinguishing between types of networks, Mark Granovetter (1973; 1983) theorized about strong ties and weak ties. Strong ties keep people who are similar, such as homogeneous groups, connected. These ties would include familial relations but also other groups of like-minded people. He suggested that the opposite of strong ties are weak ties, which connect dissimilar people across different networks. Although both forms of ties are valuable, weak ties have the benefit of connecting individuals to individuals less like themselves, which can deliver a greater variety of resources. An individual in the Elk's Club, for example, might also belong to the middle school parent organization and work at the local hospital. He becomes the weak tie, in Granovetter's term, connecting three distinctly different groups of individuals. In social capital theory this same idea is communicated through the concepts of bridging and bonding social capital (Putnam 2000). Through social relations individuals develop bonding social capital (strong ties) with individuals who are closest to them or most like them and bridging social capital (weak ties) with others who are less like them and who they are connected to through others.

Bonding and bridging social capital provide access to differing resources and are valuable for different reasons. In both cases the resources available to individuals through such social relations are real, and the social capital they generate can

accumulate and be exploited to a greater degree as it grows. Likewise, the social capital available may shrink as the family, group, or network shrinks over time. When elder members of a family pass away, connections to other branches of the family are often severed, reducing the connectedness of the family overall and the availability of resources. This, too, is why families that relocate for various reasons are usually disadvantaged during their early period in a new location where they have no family or friends (Hagan, MacMillan, and Wheaton 1996). They do not have immediate access to localized bonding or bridging social capital. Ties to individuals back home may take on altered value, since those resources are now limited to contributions that can be made by communicating across distance. Getting your former neighbor to change the brake pads on your car in exchange for something of value to him is not an option if he now lives 1,000 miles away. Likewise, turning to a neighbor for recommendations on a florist, a physician, a mechanic, or a specialty store is no longer an option if you do not know your neighbors or do not know whose opinion can be trusted.

One means by which social capital is argued to grow or decline is through civic engagement. Putnam (2000) drew national attention with his claim and evidence that civic engagement in America has been steadily declining since the 1940s. Putnam observed that each generation since the World War II generation has been less inclined to participate in civic activity and community groups, including voting, religious organizations, and civic organizations. Civic engagement is one important means by which individuals come into contact with individuals outside their immediate families and circles of friends. Putnam showed connections between lower levels of social capital and a series of undesirable outcomes in communities, including poorer health of residents, increased incidence of crime, and lower student performance in school. Lower member participation in civic organizations, clubs, leagues, churches, and political parties occurred at the same time that different forms of volunteerism and private forms of entertainment, such as television, were on the rise. Scholars are currently trying to understand how these changes, and now the addition of computing and online networks, have affected social capital and whether all of this is tied to outcomes of community interest, such as health, crime, and education.

Another means by which social capital is argued to grow comes from Coleman, who theorized about a system of intergenerational closure, where adults outside the family can play an important role in facilitating action in a child (Coleman 1988, 1990; Coleman and Hoffer 1987). Coleman's theory explains how social capital can grow across families within a school setting. Intergenerational closure refers to social relations among children, their friends, and all related parents. When the loop is closed, which is to say when parents know one another and when children know their friends' parents, children receive heightened supervision and the enforcement of desired norms is easier. In such an environment a child tempted to act against the wishes of his parents may rethink his actions if another parent he knows (and who knows his parents) happens to be nearby. Coleman believed this could explain the higher performance of students in Catholic schools (Coleman and Hoffer 1987).

Some other ideas about social capital suggest that its growth is influenced by the physical environment of a community. One study compared traditional, mixed-use, pedestrian-oriented neighborhood designs with more modern, car-dependent, suburban subdivisions. Preliminary evidence suggested that social capital was higher in the “walkable” neighborhood, where individuals had more opportunities to engage face-to-face with fellow residents and business owners as they walked to and from their activities in life (Leyden 2003). In another study, the location of a branch library, situated between an upper-income neighborhood of older residents and a lower-income neighborhood, served as a community center where senior citizens provided tutoring to elementary school children (Putnam, Feldstein, and Cohen 2003).

A challenge for metropolitan universities seeking to engage individuals living in proximity to campus is that, for many, social ties today are more likely to exist outside the neighborhood. It is, perhaps, more common today not to know one’s neighbors than to know them. Individuals may recognize one another by sight, but knowledge of likes, dislikes, family, friends, or shared interests seems increasingly rare. In analyzing lifestyle survey data, Putnam (2000) found that individuals are more likely than in years past to socialize outside of the neighborhood and the workplace. The implications of this change in social patterns are an important part of social capital research. The next section explores what research shows is more likely to occur in high social capital areas.

## **The Value of Social Capital**

Scholars examining social capital across the world are finding relationships between this theoretical construct and the outcomes that societies deem desirable. Higher levels of social capital have been linked to higher school performance (Goddard 2003; John 2005; Plagens and Stephens 2009; Putnam 2000; Teachman, Paasch, and Carver 1996); safer neighborhoods (Galea, Karpati, and Kennedy 2002; Putnam 2000; Rosenfeld, Messner, and Baumer 2001); healthier citizens (Berkman 1995; Giles et al. 2005; Putnam 2000); the success of democratic governance (Putnam 2000, 2002; Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti 1993); better government performance (De Souza Briggs 1997; Knack 2002); economic development and prosperity (Casey 2004; Krishna 2002; Putnam 2000; Temple and Johnson 1998; Woolcock 1998); ethnic peace (Krishna 2002); career or business success (Belliveau, O’Reiley, and Wade 1996; Lee and Brinton 1996; Pennings, Lee, and van Witteloostuijn 1998; Stanton-Salazar and Dornbusch 1995); and the improved management of scarce resources (Pretty 2003).

Studies examining social capital and outcomes related to it are growing continuously, totaling thousands as of this writing. A full-text search for the term “social capital” in education (66 titles), political science (66 titles), and sociology (69 titles) journal articles housed in the scholarly digital archive JSTOR produced 3,262 citations as of March 8, 2010. A search of the entire JSTOR collection produced 9,640 citations. Though the linkages being made across so many fields of study may suggest social

capital is a panacea for all things, it really should come as little surprise since at the root of most outcomes in society is some element of interpersonal interaction. There are few things in modern society that can be undertaken without the involvement of others.

Several theoretical mechanisms may explain how interactions among individuals in communities that aggregate into social capital can lead to desirable outcomes. Probably the most touted of the mechanisms is social capital's usefulness in facilitating collective action (Hanifan 1916; Putnam 2000; Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti 1993). Cooperation among individuals, or the failure to cooperate, has drawn considerable attention and produced numerous theories explaining why people act as they do when encountering others (Axelrod and Hamilton 1981; Kreps 1990; Nash 1953; Olson 1965; Ostrom 1990, 1998). Individuals do not always cooperate, even when they stand to gain considerably from joint effort, but when they do they are usually better off than if they opted to act alone.

Hanifan, the West Virginia school superintendent who wrote about social capital in the early twentieth century, provided an early and simple example of how social capital can facilitate collective action. He organized community residents for the purpose of conducting a community survey. The network of individuals created for the survey project used their newly established connections to attend to other community concerns, such as the problems of student attendance, adult literacy, youth opportunities, available reading materials, and teacher salaries. Hanifan (1916) described how the group, formed for a singular purpose, went on to lead efforts responsible for a 14 percent increase in student attendance, the start of adult literacy classes and a youth athletics league, the raising of money for school libraries, the raising of teacher salaries, and even highway improvements in the community.

A second mechanism that makes social capital valuable is its usefulness in facilitating the exchange of information and resources (Boix and Posner 1998; Bourdieu 1986; Coleman 1990), which is necessary for facilitating individual and collective action, as well as for the formation and diffusion of norms. Social capital lowers the transaction costs associated with information gathering. Individuals in a community who are connected to others are more likely to understand the problems or challenges being faced at any given time. One's ability to contribute to a solution is, in part, dependent on knowledge of a problem. A neighborhood where individuals are in frequent contact with one another will spread the word of any crime problems or threats to safety. The disconnected neighbor will be the one less likely to know about the problem and, perhaps, less likely to take necessary steps to prevent becoming the next victim. Those with knowledge of the problem are better positioned to take preventative measures and may even move to organize a temporary or ongoing neighborhood block watch group to counteract the efforts of the criminals.

The flow of information across individuals and groups also creates an opportunity for norms to emerge, such as those described by Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti (1993). They found that norms of reciprocity and honesty among connected individuals reduced the likelihood that citizens would "free-ride" on their neighbors, leaving them

to solve problems common to all. Instead, the presence of these norms helped individuals working on community problems to gain credible commitments from others. A *New York Times* article comparing the lobster industries of New England and Australia found dramatically different conditions (Tierney 2000), which can be attributed to levels of social capital. Faced with a problem of declining lobster stocks and an increase in resources needed to catch fewer pounds of lobster, Australian lobstermen coordinated action into a licensing and quota system. Norms of honesty and respect for the system emerged and helped to preserve and then grow the lobster stock, thus preserving the industry. As a result, Australian lobstermen worked fewer hours, earned more money and were more likely to have a fishery well into the future. The New Englanders, who were stuck in a cycle of distrust and a winner-take-all environment, worked more hours, earned less and were witness to a fishery on the verge of collapse. The notable difference in the two communities is the social capital, which has been shown to be valuable in managing scarce resources (Pretty 2003).

The majority of social capital research focuses on positive outcomes that can be derived from social capital, but scholars have raised issues about potential problems or downsides, too. Like other resources or forms of capital, social capital is not by nature positive. In the same way that individuals can use money, knowledge, tools, or equipment to harm themselves or others, social connections and norms can be used toward ends that run counter to the community's interest as a whole. The Ku Klux Klan and organized crime families are examples of organizations that use social capital in ways that harm others (Portes and Landolt 1996). Social connections can also lead to norms that discourage individuals from pursuing worthwhile endeavors. In the same way that norms facilitating action emerge in education and encourage achievement or success overall, some have emerged that actually discourage students from pursuing certain fields: For years, young girls were steered away from math and science courses and toward fields thought to be more "appropriate" for women.

The downsides or problems with social capital are important and warrant further exploration, but they should not deter metropolitan university administrators seeking to grow the resource in their own communities. The university and its resources might prove to be helpful to community members seeking to break through some of the barriers that emerge from social structure. Despite concerns, there remains ample evidence that social capital is a powerful resource that can be used to achieve desired outcomes. The remainder of this article looks at the case of one Midwestern university that has gathered preliminary data about social capital and is seeking to revitalize its off-campus area.

## **The University of Akron and University Park**

The University of Akron is one of fourteen publicly funded four-year universities in the state of Ohio. Its mission as primarily a commuter school means few of the eighty-seven main campus buildings, which are situated on 222 acres in Akron's downtown area, provide residential space for students. Those seeking accommodations often look in the nearby neighborhoods. Although some private money has been invested in new

construction, the area is mostly populated with early twentieth-century homes built for laborers in the once-thriving tire manufacturing industry. The off-campus residential area houses a diverse mix of students, working adults with and without children, and senior citizens. Census figures from 2000 show a population of 217,074 in the City of Akron, with 11,352 of those individuals estimated to be living around the university in the area now referred to as University Park.

The University of Akron, under its current and previous names, has a long history in the community. College instruction began in 1870 as a private institution. The college and its assets were transferred to the City of Akron in 1913 and later to the State of Ohio in 1967. Enrollment now stands at more than 27,000, the third largest among the state's schools. Two periods in recent history mark major physical growth of the campus. The first period occurred between 1951 and 1971. The second period is currently under way. The university is in the midst of a \$200 million campus enhancement effort that has included the closing of city streets through campus, the narrowing of other streets, the construction of a new Honor's College facility, a student dorm, a recreation center, a student union, and an on-campus football stadium. Figure 1 shows how the campus has expanded since the 1960s. The creation of significant amounts of green space—brought about in one area by the demolition of a classroom building—has enhanced the overall appearance of campus.

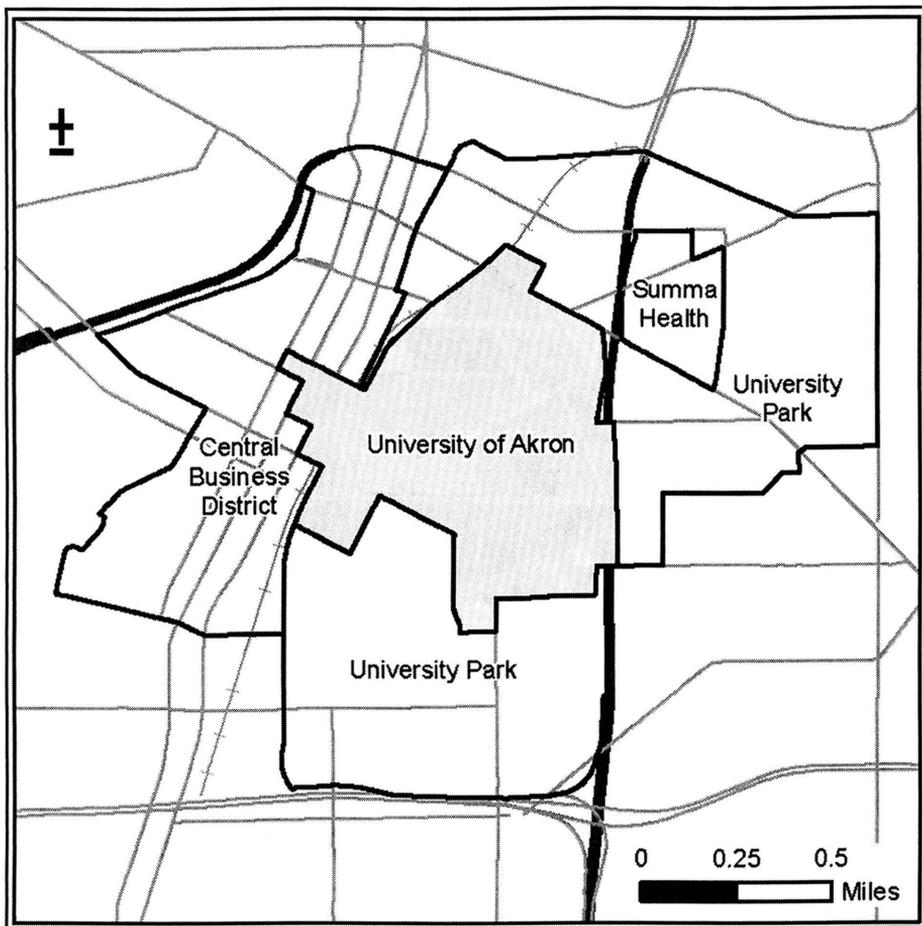
A desire on the part of multiple actors to revitalize the fifty-block area surrounding campus crystallized into University Park Alliance, a collaboration of The University of Akron, the City of Akron, Summa Health Systems, and several other partners, including Akron Children's Hospital, Akron General Health System, *The Akron Beacon Journal*, Akron Metropolitan Housing Authority, Greater Akron Chamber of Commerce, Akron Public Schools, and University Park Development Corporation. The partners are supported in their efforts by major grants from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, the first of which was \$2.5 million and came in 2001. Another \$10 million investment by the foundation was announced in 2008. The goal of the alliance is revitalization through engaging the community and catalyzing real estate and business investment. Engagement activities include sustaining partnerships, implementing a community-wide vision for the area, service-learning activities for students, applied faculty research, volunteerism, and developing the capacity for neighborhood groups, community organizations, and grassroots leadership.

**Figure 1. Campus Expansion from 1960 to 2010.**



Information about the characteristics and opinions of individuals living in the fifty-block area comes from the U.S. Census and a 2007 mail survey. Census data from 2000 show that 50 percent of those 25 and older had less than a high school degree; 70 percent of houses were occupied by renters and 11 percent were unoccupied; the median household income of renters was \$16,800 and of owners was \$32,700; 44 percent of renters and 14 percent of owners were living in poverty; and 68 percent of residents were white. The majority of non-whites were African-American. Children below the age of 18 made up 14 percent of the population. The neighborhood compared similarly to the city overall, with the exceptions of renters versus owners and the percentage of children below the age of 18. University Park had significantly more renters (70.1 percent versus 37.7 percent), fewer owners (19.1 percent versus 54.9 percent) and fewer children under the age of 18 (14.4 percent compared to 25.3 percent). Compared to 1990 Census data, the University Park population in 2000 was larger, more educated, and better off financially. Figure 2 shows the geographic area of the university and its surrounding neighborhoods.

**Figure 2. University Footprint and UPA.**



**University Park Survey Results, Excluding Social Capital**

The 2007 survey of households included baseline measures of social capital, which will be discussed in the next section, but the primary purpose of the survey was to gather information about the opinions of residents on topics important to the revitalization effort. Questions were asked about the availability of computer technology in the home, safety, the provision of services, and general attitudes and concerns. The demographic data from the U.S. Census, discussed above, suggest the neighborhood is changing in its general composition, but it does not help administrators understand whether the quality of life is improving for residents or whether untapped resources might be available that could help improve the effort.

The method chosen to gather information from University Park residents was a mail survey. A two-page survey was sent in September 2007 to 3,510 deliverable addresses in University Park. Thirteen percent of surveys sent (or a total of 456) were returned. Residents of University Park who responded to the survey reported having a computer in the home (74 percent) or a computer and access to the Internet (62 percent). They

are not proud of their neighborhood (73 percent). Their top five concerns included crime (75 percent), drug dealing or drug use (66 percent), appearance of the neighborhood (63 percent), property upkeep or codes enforcement (50 percent), and vandalism or graffiti (49 percent). Residents were more likely to say they felt unsafe (56 percent) than safe (44 percent). Among city services, fire, police, and trash pickup were rated above average (on a scale of one to five). Respondents gave about average approval ratings to street repair, snow removal services, and schools. Parks and recreation programs scored below average. Eighty-five percent of respondents reported that they do not feel informed about what is going on in University Park. By the description of residents the neighborhood struggles with issues common to metropolitan environments.

### **Social Capital and University Park: A Preliminary Assessment**

The nature of social capital as an intangible resource makes measurement more challenging than for physical, financial, or even human capital. Assessing knowledge and the finer details of human capital poses a challenge more equal to that of social capital. Since neither can be observed, the most frequent means of arriving at an understanding comes from asking questions through interviews, focus groups, or public opinion surveys. The proliferation of interest and research into social capital has led to at least a few large-scale efforts to establish some systematic means of measuring social capital. Two influential efforts are The World Bank Survey and The Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey. The Community Benchmark Survey was developed by the Saguaro Seminar of the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. In cooperation with foundations and private funding sources, it has been conducted in thirty-three communities in twenty-eight states. Nearly 30,000 individuals have participated in the survey. (Details of the survey can be found at <http://www.cfsv.org/communitysurvey/index.html>.)

Questions posed to residents of University Park in Akron were drawn from The Benchmark Survey. Residents were asked about their willingness to trust others, their involvement in neighborhood organizations, the frequency of their volunteering, attendance at public meetings, attendance at club or organization meetings, and the frequency with which they have had friends over or been to friends' homes in the neighborhood and outside the neighborhood. Although these few questions cannot measure all the possible means by which people generate social capital, they can tap at a basic level the extent to which people are engaging in their community and the extent to which they are putting themselves in positions to meet others outside their immediate circle of friends. A high social capital community is somewhere people will be more likely to trust others, will be involved in groups and activities and will be socializing with friends on a regular basis. As a result, collective action becomes more likely, information flows with lower transaction costs, and enforcement of norms is more likely.

Results from the University Park survey in 2007 show most respondents are less likely to trust others and are not involved in more formalized activities of neighborhood life,

such as belonging to a neighborhood organization, attending club meetings, or attending public meetings. Seven of ten respondents reported that most people cannot be trusted, and nine of ten reported not being involved in a neighborhood organization at the time the survey was administered. More than half of respondents reported that in the twelve months preceding the survey they had not volunteered, attended a public meeting, or attended an organization or club meeting of any kind. Respondents did report more informal modes of interaction, such as entertaining friends at home or going to the home of friends (see Table 1). Lack of trust and involvement are characteristics of low social capital communities.

Variations in trust and involvement are observed when the data are broken down by gender, race and home ownership. When it came to trusting others, there was a statistically significant difference between the genders and between renters and owners. Female respondents were less likely to be trustful of others than were males (Chi-Square,  $p < .05$ ), and home owners were more likely to be trusting of others than were renters (Chi-Square,  $p < .10$ ). A Chi-Square test of gender and home ownerships was run to determine whether the difference in trust and home ownership might have something to do with a difference in the gender of owners. The test revealed no significant difference. There was no statistically significant difference in the trustfulness of whites or non-whites in the neighborhood. When it came to involvement in a neighborhood organization, there was no difference between the genders, but there was a difference between the races and between owners and renters. Non-whites were significantly more likely than whites to belong to a neighborhood organization (Chi-Square,  $p < .05$ ) and so were home owners (Chi-Square,  $p < .05$ ).

**Table 1. 2007 Community Survey Social Capital Items (%)**

Survey Item	Response Categories			
	<i>Most people can be trusted</i>		<i>You can't be too careful</i>	
Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?	27.9		72.1	
Are you presently involved in any neighborhood organizations?	<i>No</i> 89.7		<i>Yes</i> 10.3	
How many times in the past twelve months have you . . .	<i>Zero</i>	<i>1-2</i>	<i>3-5</i>	<i>More than 5</i>
. . . volunteered?	55.3	20.4	9.5	14.7
. . . attended any public meeting in which there was discussion of town or school affairs?	68.3	21.0	7.7	2.9
. . . attended any club or organization meeting?	62.8	16.1	6.6	14.5
. . . had friends over to your home or been to the home of friends in the neighborhood?	26.5	15.9	15.9	41.7

Five questions on the survey asked about the frequency of volunteerism, attendance at any club or organization meeting, attendance at a public meeting, socializing with friends from within the neighborhood and socializing with friends from outside the neighborhood (see Table 1). The multiple response categories shown for these variables in Table 1 were collapsed into two categories for testing. The two categories are “zero” and “at least once.” When examined by gender, race, and home ownership, several interesting relationships were found. Home owners were significantly more likely than renters to have attended at least one club meeting and to have attended at least one public meeting in the past twelve months (Chi-Square,  $p < .05$ ). Interestingly, there was a significant relationship between homeownership and socializing with friends from within the neighborhood, but unexpectedly it was the renters who were shown to be more likely than homeowners to have socialized with friends from within the neighborhood at least once in the past twelve months (Chi-Square,  $p < .01$ ). When it came to socializing with friends from outside the neighborhood, there was a significant difference in the races. Whites were more likely to have socialized with friends from outside the neighborhood than were nonwhites (Chi-Square,  $p < .05$ ). A final series of tests looked at whether there was a relationship between one’s willingness to trust others and one’s involvement with others, either formally or informally. No significance was found. Trust and involvement in community life in this case appear to be unrelated.

## **Discussion**

The initial data collected in 2007 from University Park residents, though not conclusive, suggests that social capital levels in University Park are low. Survey respondents do not hold their neighborhood in particularly high esteem and clearly believe there are serious issues lowering the overall quality of living for residents. This baseline data can be helpful for university administrators and local leaders who are a part of the improvement process. Although the value of social capital as a resource is debated, anecdotes from other cities suggest it can be useful and that some actions already taken in University Park since 2007 might provide the foundation for positive change.

Two anecdotes show how social capital can grow in communities even without making social capital the priority. The Dudley Street neighborhood initiative in Boston and local members of the Do Something League in Waupun, Wisconsin, are examples of adults and children coming together to solve community problems (Putnam, Feldstein, and Cohen 2003). The Dudley Street initiative began after a social service agency for Latinos requested funds from a Boston-area foundation for new carpeting at the center. A visit from a foundation trustee led to conversation among area agency leaders about a more organized and active approach to reform. More than twenty years later the grass-roots organization that emerged has helped to bridge connections among residents from four distinct ethnicities and direct energy and resources toward major change in the neighborhood. Likewise, sixth-graders at Waupun Middle School met in a town-hall-style meeting to settle on service-oriented projects. Among the three they

chase was an effort to improve safety at a railroad crossing near the school. After making a presentation before city council and surveying residents about safety at the crossing, momentum began that ultimately led to improved signage and landscape renovations to improve visibility in the name of safety. These examples are just two of many that suggest there is no obvious reason that similar activity in University Park could not produce equally important results for residents and the university.

In the past several years, initiatives in University Park have led to activities and improvements that are anticipated to bring positive change and introduce opportunities to grow social capital. Since 2007, members of the Alpha Sigma Phi fraternity at the university have been part of collaborative efforts to enhance Grace Park, University Park's oldest and most formal park. The university's Associated Student Government has been instrumental in planning, promoting and implementing annual neighborhood picnics in University Park that are designed to bring student residents and permanent residents together for an afternoon. More than five hundred residents attended in 2009. A local artist in 2009 conceived and organized a lantern festival in one area of the neighborhood that drew more than five hundred participants. The evening was presented by the University Park Business Association. A new non-profit organization emerged in late 2008: LINKS Community and Family Services is now assisting residents with tax preparation, food-stamp eligibility, cash assistance, home energy support, medical aid, and other services. Out of this organization have come neighborhood clean-ups and the formation of a 20-plus neighborhood watch group.

In addition to the variety of activities that are drawing residents into closer contact with one another, there have been major infrastructure improvement investments. A local foundation spent more than three million dollars renovating a historic residence in the area for office space. The nearly 16,000-square-foot space had been vacant for fifteen years before the GAR Foundation stepped in to transform the building, which will now house the foundation staff and will serve as the local offices of the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. Multimillion dollar grants from the Knight Foundation have been the catalysts for much of the energy emerging in University Park. The university itself has invested in the area with the construction of a new football stadium on campus. It has also facilitated the investment of private money to build student-oriented housing in several locations just off the edge of campus.

The energy directed into University Park over the past decade and longer shows signs of growing. The unveiling of a new marketing campaign in winter 2010 is drawing favorable attention within the community. In May 2010, University Park Alliance and University Park Development Corporation announced they would merge. The organizations have shared similar goals for years and are now merging under the title University Park Alliance to leverage the strengths of both organizations against the challenges of the neighborhood. UPA is viewed as providing institutional strength from the synergy of major organizational collaborations and UPDC is viewed as contributing grassroots connections from within the community. Both contributions are vitally important to future growth and improvement.

## Conclusion

This article raised the question of whether university administrators might benefit from beginning to think in terms of social capital levels in the areas where their institutions are situated. It did so to suggest that moving beyond thinking primarily in terms of community relations or community engagement might reveal the presence or absence of a valuable, untapped resource. The case of University of Akron has been used to illustrate how efforts to engage and revitalize areas surrounding a campus may depend on improving the social relations between residents.

Research has shown social capital to be a valuable resource in other communities that have faced similar, or even more daunting, roads to improvement. The analysis of data from the University Park area surrounding The University of Akron campus suggests that this metropolitan university has an opportunity to grow this valuable resource and may already be on a strong path to doing so. Preliminary indicators suggest that as of 2007 social capital was low. Efforts since then are consistent with the findings of previous research that suggests these very activities are classic for growing social capital. Follow-up research in this neighborhood would provide an interesting look at the growth and value of social capital as a resource for stimulating change in the metropolitan university context, although more measures and a more thorough collection of data would be required.

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