

The Urban Communications Teaching and Research Center

The Urban Communications Teaching and Research Center is located at Livingston College of Rutgers University. The Department of Community Development's undergraduate program includes areas of concentration within the major such as housing, social service, health, economics, planning, and urban communications. As part of course content, students spend considerable time working as communications facilitators in metropolitan communities. A general thrust of our work involves the need for the means of communications (technology, skills, distribution channels) to be made available for use on the community level in more than a token sense. The UCTRC has devoted much of its efforts to the establishment of a community communications center in Plainfield, N.J., a center sponsored by OEO and designed to meet many of these community information needs. It is based at Community Action Plainfield (CAP) the official antipoverty agency in the community.

Cable television is just now beginning significant operations in Plainfield and one of our key roles is to serve as community programming originators and facilitators. As has been the case in many other areas, the CATV interests have been reluctant to take on the task of providing meaningful community access programming without considerable prodding; we are serving as one of the prodders. Community access as a concept has to be both sold to local CATV people and to local communities before either will support it in terms of real participation and allocation of resources. The Plainfield Center's programming (community culture, health services information, housing needs, local events, problems, possibilities, etc.) is originated over the cable system. At the same time, cable programming personnel are trained in 1/2 inch video by UCTRC

and Plainfield Communications Center people. The next step, of course, is to get the cable system to back up its local commitment in the form of origination resources made available to the community.

Half-inch video is also being used as a self-exploration and analysis tool on the community level, as a means of turning kids on to themselves and their environment, as a political and social change tool, and as an organizational and documentation process tool. Alternate community radio programming is also produced out of the CAP center and aired on an AM station. Community-based photography and print/graphics workshops add to the multi-media package. The linkages between the community and Livingston College become stronger as students, faculty, anti-poverty staff, and community people work side-by-side as local communicators.

UCTRC is heavily committed to environmental documentation, a project that seeks to document urban, suburban, and rural environments in New Jersey, and to stimulate local participation in the (documentation/analysis/action) process surrounding the planning and development of these areas. With the co-sponsorship of the Livingston Art Department, students in this project have become involved with such areas as: The inner city of New Brunswick, the historic falls district of Paterson, the development process of the Hackensack Meadows, and the rural-suburban transition of Hunterdon County.

The tools used in this project are again part of a multi-media package; local resource cataloging and utilization are combined with local media workshops and group involvement. Shows are given in each area and institutions such as local arts centers, historical