

**POSITION PAPERS**  
**Urban**

**Chris Kimball**  
**Augsburg College: Authentically Urban**

**Gordon Nelson**  
**A Reflection on What its Urban Setting**  
**Should Mean for Augsburg College**

**The Meaning of Urban will be discussed on**  
**November 7 at 3:30 in the Marshall Room.**



## **Augsburg College: Authentically Urban**

This paper will argue that while Augsburg has done many positive things to build its education around our urban location, more needs to be done. One important step is to make a more deliberate effort to see the city's assets, rather than just focusing on its problems. This broader perspective will help us articulate what is so attractive about urban life. A second set of recommendations involves relatively minor changes in the curriculum. Third, the institution's commitment to the community should include the housing of some faculty and staff on (or near) campus.

There is considerable irony in Augsburg's commitment to the city. Put bluntly, the city is not committed to Augsburg. The metro area generally ignores Augsburg, and certainly does not see us as a "city" school. This situation is no doubt aggravated by the presence of a large land-grant university in the Twin Cities, one whose mission includes outreach. Still, Augsburg has not made enough people notice that we are here.

Take maps, for instance. Maps are revealing visual explanations of how people perceive cities. The Rand-McNally Road Atlas and the Gousha "Flash Map," to give two examples, mark local colleges and universities with boundaries encompassing many city blocks. Not Augsburg, however. Instead, we are relegated to a single dot. At best, we are assigned the square block bounded by I-94, 21st and 22nd Avenues, and 7th Street. Of all the colleges and universities, Augsburg has the least prominent--and least

accurate--place on the Twin Cities map. To make matters worse, many maps still in wide use continue to label us as "Augsburg College and Theological Seminary."

One can put this down to poor editing by the map makers. Nevertheless, that so many current maps fail to identify us properly in terms of name and space suggests that we are not on the "mental map" of the Twin Cities. This problem, of course, is one being addressed by the "Visibility" campaign. Still, it is also one that should caution us about the success of our urban-oriented programs. If we are to be an urban-centered institution, we need to tell the city who and what we are, and to show how we contribute to the future of our community.

#### Two Urban Perspectives

Historically, Americans have held two competing images of cities. On the one hand, cities offer the promise of economic opportunity, the lure of entertainment, and the exposure to new and exciting, even dazzling, things. Millions of people have been drawn to cities by jobs, by family connections, and by the promise of a life more complex and more compelling than that offered by rural places. The United States has become steadily urbanized throughout its history so that now the vast majority of the population lives in urban places.

For many years, this extraordinary process led observers to study the ways in which cities have held together, not what caused them to fall apart. As the urban historian Carl Abbott put it recently, scholars asked "how have the members of these

aggregations managed to coalesce, interact, and function as civic entities [or metropolitan communities, to use twentieth-century language]?" Abbott goes on to note that cities are places where civil society survives despite great social, economic, political, and cultural pressures. Thus, through much of our national history, cities were celebrated by boosters who linked the achievements of their community with the success of the nation. Yet this appreciation of urban life is increasingly overwhelmed by a second dominant perspective.

Americans have also believed that cities embody the worst aspects of modern life. In this view, they are characterized by poverty, crime and decay, both spiritual and physical. Rather than seeing cities as successes, this view defines cities as failures. Increasingly, this anti-urban view is expressed in language that borders on the apocalyptic. One recent paper on the latest "urban crisis" focused on the "sheer destitution and decay" of America's cities, describing them as places characterized by "persistent poverty, racial segregation, and fiscal crisis . . . " Suspicious and scared of cities, this perspective finds instead that the good life resides in an imagined small town community located somewhere in the not-too-distant past.

Finding common ground between these competing images is difficult. Augsburg College and the members of its community--students, staff, alumni, faculty--respond to both images. Our current advertising slogan captures both perspectives. Yet our focus has too often been on the city as problem. Underlying this

paper, then, is an argument that we must also rediscover and reemphasize the city as an asset--not just economically, but socially, culturally, and spiritually.

### Augsburg's Mission

In its mission statement, Augsburg College claims to offer an education that is, in part, "shaped by the context of a vital metropolitan setting." That definition offers in latitude what it lacks in clarity. The nature of the metropolitan region and the characteristics of its vitality are certainly open to debate. Indeed, the term "metropolitan" generates associations different from "city" and "urban." And even if everyone agreed on the meaning of those terms, how they enter the education program of the college is also open to debate.

The nature of mission statements, of course, is to offer a very general statement without unduly limiting the institution's flexibility. In Augsburg's case, the commitment to being a college shaped by its surroundings has been admirably carried out in a variety of ways for the past thirty years. Yet, if we are to survive and flourish as a college, we must be much more active in our use of the city and its resources.

The task for Augsburg, then, is to balance the two perspectives in a way that talks about the city's strengths as well as its weaknesses. Put simply, Augsburg has to embrace the city as a place of opportunity, the site of individual and collective achievement, while continuing to acknowledge (and respond to) its very real problems. In recent decades, Augsburg

has directly addressed the problems that plague our cities. At the same time, we need to express an appreciation of cities and make that more nuanced approach a magnet to bring in students, faculty, staff, and donors.

Let me borrow from discussions held this summer at the Vocation of a Lutheran College Conference. During that conference, there was an attempt to shift from thinking about what made ELCA institutions "distinctively" Lutheran to focusing on how they might be "authentically" Lutheran. While that shift in vocabulary was not entirely satisfactory, it does offer a framework for exploring our city connections.

Is Augsburg distinctively urban? No. There are many other institutions located in the Twin Cities, including liberal arts colleges and church-related institutions. There is, on the surface, little to suggest that our location is distinctive. What about the claim that Augsburg is unique in being an urban, Lutheran, liberal arts college? Here, too, one must recognize that several institutions fit those categories, although we can claim to be the only midwestern Lutheran college in a "major" metropolitan area. In other words, our city location alone does not readily provide us with a special identity, one that separates us from the colleges and universities with whom we compete for students and resources.

Having said that, however, can we make Augsburg an institution that is "authentically" urban, one in which our location is intrinsic to what we do? Here the answer is yes,

especially given what is already going on in our curriculum. Let us look at a few prominent examples.

1. Augsburg has done exceedingly well in using its commitment to service as a reason for addressing urban problems. Community service experiences engage students in tackling many social ills, while programs such as Social Work and Education are also committed to change. This is as it should be. But we should recognize that it is based on the negative image of the city. At the same time, those programs that define the city more positively, and equally accurately, as a place for good, high-paying jobs rarely do so with an intentional examination of the forces that make those jobs possible. Such an examination should result in our graduates (as well as our faculty and staff) growing in their understanding and commitment to the community building enterprise.

2. Our General Education should be applauded for making the study (or experience) of urbanism one of the required perspectives. That component, however, is a smaller part of General Education than the other parts of our mission. Just as the commitment to diversity is mandated throughout the GenEd program, so too should explicit consideration of the city be required across the perspectives.

3. In addition, our FYE orientation program exposes new students to community service projects. This should be continued. But we should also ensure that first-year students are acquainted with the cultural opportunities of the metropolitan region.



Consider the Orientation Tuesday before the start of classes in the fall. New students are taken out in the community to help with a problem in the afternoon and then returned to campus for fun in evening. Instead, we could pair the community service with an off-campus experience that reveal the cultural richness of the city: music, theater, architecture, history, and the like.

4. The Urban Studies major has been greatly strengthened by recent hirings of Social Sciences faculty members who have expertise in urban matters. It is now time to consider expanding the focus on the city to other disciplines. One possibility is a Humanities track within the Urban Studies major. More generally, Urban Studies should continue to increase its visibility on campus. The HECUA programs should be further encouraged as we seek to support all students in the process of becoming engaged urban citizens.

5. Then there is the matter of internships. Augsburg has an active internship program, one which we are working hard to expand. Yet internships taken for academic credit, the way in which learning and experience are best joined, seem to be declining in recent years because of a complex set of factors. These include fewer courses required for graduation, double majoring, and departmental priorities. It is time to encourage, if not require, most majors to include an academic internship as part of the major, both as a way to deepen the learning associated with the major and as a way to enrich the content and application of our academic programs.

## The Neighborhood

Now, let us turn to the College's immediate physical environment. Augsburg is located in a specific community, the neighborhood of Cedar-Riverside. In many ways, the College has been a good neighbor, one committed to the area's vitality. In some respects, however, there has been a gap between our commitments and our actions. Specifically, Augsburg affords hundreds of students the opportunity to live in the urban environment of Cedar-Riverside. Indeed, first-year students are strongly encouraged to live on campus. Other students live off-campus but within walking distance.

The same cannot be said of the faculty and staff. All too few live nearby and do not have the same 24-hour stake in the community that our students have. (Let me point out that I do not live in the neighborhood and so am part of the problem.) As a result, the members of the Augsburg community who walk along our streets and sidewalks from 8 am to 6 pm are different from those who walk them (or shun them, perhaps) at night.

For Augsburg to survive, people must be willing to come here to work and to study; students, in particular, must be willing to live here. Augsburg should follow the examples of colleges both big (The University of Chicago) and small (Lycoming College) by making a commitment to housing more faculty and staff on or near campus. There was once a residential presence for faculty and staff. It should be restored.

Objections to this proposal will come swiftly and

predictably: how can a college with Augsburg's limited resources spend its time developing and managing real estate? Cost, to be sure, is a crucial factor. Before we assume that such a policy is unrealistic, however, let me point out that, in the cases cited above, the decision to invest in neighborhood housing was made in periods of severe budget deficits and grave doubts about the institution's future. These decisions were not taken when there was much money available. In such cases, the choice was often very simple: invest in the area around the campus, move to a new location (usually impractical), or close the doors.

Providing opportunities for faculty and staff to live near the campus will provide several positive benefits. There will be greater opportunities for interaction between students, faculty, and staff outside the normal workday. More residents may provide a more vibrant street life and Augsburg can have a stronger voice in neighborhood groups. The Trinity Lutheran townhouses and apartments around St. Martin's Table are testimony to what can be done in this regard.

Certainly, such a housing program must be modest. Most faculty and staff are committed to their neighborhoods and suburbs. New faculty and staff still tend to be recruited locally and thus are likely to have established homes. But for those who are new to the College and who have been recruited nationally such an option would be attractive. Moving the chief officers of the College to the neighborhood would also be a powerful statement about Augsburg's commitment to Cedar-Riverside. As the

neighborhood becomes increasingly swallowed up by institutions and their parking ramps, Augsburg represents one of the last hopes for making this area one in which people actually live.

### Conclusion

While this paper does make several proposals, its primary purpose is to stimulate discussion about what it means to be a college of the city. Augsburg College has already done much to anchor itself in the Twin Cities; now we need to develop ways in which to make the commitment attractive to those who will invest their time and their money here. If we can help define cities positively, we will go a long way to ensuring our survival. So, we need to make a collective effort to define the city as a place of intellectual, social, cultural as well as economic opportunity, a place where millions have come together, struggled to make a common life, and continue to do so despite the many very real problems that we are already committed to addressing.

Chris Kimball  
Department of History

*Thanks to Garry Hesser, Richard Nelson, and Elizabeth Kimball for their comments and suggestions.*

A REFLECTION ON WHAT ITS URBAN SETTING  
SHOULD MEAN FOR AUGSBURG COLLEGE

by

Gordon L. Nelson, Ph. D.

Professor of Sociology

October 1, 1996



## A REFLECTION ON WHAT ITS URBAN SETTING

### SHOULD MEAN FOR AUGSBURG COLLEGE

Those of you who watched the Democratic National Convention this past August probably grew a bit weary of the comparisons between the Chicago convention of 1968 and the one this year. For me, the flashbacks revived memories of my first year at Augsburg College -- especially the spring of 1968.

One particular memory is that of my displeasure shortly after Eugene McCarthy's showing in the New Hampshire primary revealed Lyndon Johnson's vulnerability and prompted Robert Kennedy to announce that he, too, would seek the Democratic presidential nomination. As a McCarthy supporter, I was upset with what I considered to be blatant opportunism on Kennedy's part. I admired McCarthy for having launched a seemingly quixotic effort to topple an incumbent president when no one else was willing to do so and felt that Kennedy had entered the race only after that incumbent appeared beatable. As far as I was concerned, McCarthy's willingness gave him the edge when it came to testing one's character.

Some two years later in January of 1970 an article by Michael Novak in Christianity and Crisis reinforced the conclusion I had reached back in 1968. Novak observed that both McCarthy and Kennedy were Roman Catholics but that the ethos of one's upbringing differed markedly from that of the other. Kennedy grew up in the Archdiocese of Boston; McCarthy grew up in Minnesota's Diocese of St. Cloud. The Catholics of Boston were aggressive activists determined to succeed in American society. The Saint Cloud Catholics had a contemplative style concerned less with success and more with a commitment to the values that shaped their being. One ethos led an

ambitious United States Senator to declare his candidacy when success seemed within grasp while the other led a rather enigmatic United States Senator to embark on an apparent "lost cause" when conscience would not permit otherwise.

Novak summed it all up by observing that for Kennedy "doing" was more important than "being" whereas for McCarthy "being" was more important than "doing". Novak acknowledged that the distinction between "being" and "doing" was an "ancient theme" but was one that could, nonetheless, provide a basis for understanding the tensions that beset a nation in that memorable spring of 1968.

This reminiscence on my part is my way of suggesting that this very same distinction is an appropriate starting point for reflection on the shape and style of Augsburg's role in the urban setting where we find ourselves. I would contend that when it comes to that shape and style, "being" is as important, if not more important, than "doing". Accordingly, our vision must focus on "being" as well as "doing".

To put it another way, we must be a part of our urban setting as well as utilizing it -- or even serving it. The former is, in some ways, more of a challenge than the latter. But, if we do not respond to that challenge, whatever we might intend by the latter runs the risk of being misunderstood and unappreciated.

Why is "being" more of a challenge than "doing"? In part, the answer may lie in those dimensions of "being" over which we have no control -- dimensions which are also at the very core of the concept of community. What I have in mind can perhaps be illustrated by a comment made by a neighborhood activist when he spoke to Augsburg classes in the



year that our urban studies program was initiated. The speaker was Charlie Hoffman, then an activist in Cedar-Riverside and now an activist in Seward neighborhood. Hoffman observed that communities are something that happen as opposed to being intentionally created, programmed, or built.

Hoffman, in a way, was echoing the German sociologist, Ferdinand Tönnies, whose key distinction, made early in this century, anticipated the current concern regarding the loss of a sense of community. The distinction is the one between "gemeinschaft" and "gesellschaft" -- two German words usually translated as "community" and "society" respectively. For Tönnies, "gemeinschaft" is natural and organic while a "gesellschaft" is artificial and mechanical. He noted that one is born into a "gemeinschaft" whereas one enters into a "gesellschaft" as one would travel to a far country. While not using the same words, Hoffman was suggesting that a "gemeinschaft" is something that happens naturally whereas a "gesellschaft" requires something like strategic planning.

Tönnies attached values to "gemeinschaft" and "gesellschaft". He viewed the former positively and the latter negatively. When it happens, "gemeinschaft" is something we would want to sustain and nourish. In contrast, Tönnies said that "gesellschaft" is characterized by an underlying suspicion brought on by the fact that in such a setting we compete with one another and calculate how we might gain material advantage for ourselves. If success in a "gesellschaft" is to be gained at the expense of the community, so be it.

I think there is a parallel between Tönnies' classic distinction and the one that is the focus of this paper. There is an affinity between "being" and "gemeinschaft" just as there tends to be one between

"doing" and "gesellschaft". Is being part of an urban community something that we value as an end in itself or is it something we view as a way to gain material advantage and an enhanced image for ourselves?

It seems to me that the language of the Growth Design Corporation's report when it comes to Augsburg's urban setting tilts strongly toward the latter. Here is a sample quotation:

"In general . . . participants expressed the belief that more advantage should be taken of the Minneapolis location. Most acknowledge Augsburg has utilized its location in some measure, but many believe it affords great opportunity for enhanced service, learning options, and recognition. Many of your constituents call for a more aggressive program of intentional connecting to the community. As one person said, 'We must leverage our urban location more.'" (Page 9)

Take more advantage of? Utilize? Aggressive program of intentional connecting? Leverage? Sounds like "gesellschaft" to me!

When we give primacy to an emphasis on our urban setting because it is advantageous to do so in a "gesellschaft" sense, we run the risk of raising suspicions among our neighbors. And, that has happened. I found it disconcerting, for example, to read the following in a neighborhood newspaper:

". . . it would help if the dominant institutions in the neighborhood -- University of Minnesota, Augsburg College, Fairview-Riverside Medical Center -- moved beyond just showing up to finesse whatever impact their next building project might obtain and became regular and genuine partners in all aspects of West Bank life." (Page 5, The Surveyor, November, 1994)

Even if such neighborhood suspicions are unfounded, as I expect they are to a large extent, it is unfortunate that they do exist. Perhaps a way to allay such suspicions would be for us on occasion to act in the interest of the community even when it may not be in our own self-interest to do so. Augsburg's relationship with the North Country Co-op may be just such a case in point.

In any event, I hope readers noted a few paragraphs back my assertion that there tends to be an affinity between "doing" and "gesellschaft". My choice of the verb was deliberate, for it need not necessarily be the case that "doing" is limited solely to ends characteristic of "gesellschaft". There is the possibility, instead, that "doing" can lead to the fulfillment of our "being".

Such fulfillment can happen when we recognize that our urban setting and the hope of realizing our essence as a liberal arts college are intertwined. The urban sociologist, Louis Wirth, once observed that the most hopeful variable found in the urban situation is that of heterogeneity -- the likelihood that the more people you have around you the less likely will it be that everyone around you will be the same. One need only wait for a bus on Cedar Avenue or shop at the Cub Foods just south of here to be aware of that. Wirth hoped that encounters with such heterogeneity would engender a cosmopolitan and tolerant attitude.

Gibson Winter, one of my professors in graduate school, once observed to us that such heterogeneity -- today we call it diversity -- is necessary if we are to be fulfilled as human beings. Winter argued that a person who is fulfilled is also a person who is free, that a key

component of freedom is a capacity to make choices, and that we must be aware of alternatives if we are going to develop that capacity. We become aware of such alternatives when we encounter people who think differently than we do. Winter's argument parallels the idea that a liberal arts education is a liberating experience because it makes us aware of differing perspectives.

In the past few years the extent to which we have emphasized Augsburg's motto, "Education for Service," seems to have eclipsed that other motto of ours, "Through Truth to Freedom," -- which, to my knowledge, is still extant. Perhaps it is time that we give equal emphasis to both. Since the truth that frees us includes an awareness that we can never be content with the assumption that we already know all that there is to know, what better place to pursue truth than in the diverse urban setting where we find ourselves -- not because to do so will guarantee success and recognition but because to do so affirms the essence of our being and we cannot do otherwise.