

# *The Logic of Upland: A City Uncovered*

*A Los Angeles Coro Fellows Study  
September 2011*

## ***The Project***

What is the logic of Upland? From September 7<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup>, the 2011-2012 Los Angeles Coro Fellows lived and breathed this exact question. While we initially focused on pinpointing a definitive and succinct answer to the logic, what we found through our research and analysis revealed much more than any one label ever could. By examining the pieces, people, dynamics, conflicts, and spirit that makes up the whole of Upland, we uncovered key lessons from how its self-government functions that we believe could apply to any U.S. city.

## ***Our Research***

We began our research with a series of interviews with government officials, then expanded to include candid input from business owners, commuters, non-profit organizations, faith-based institutions, real estate developers, city hall employees, youth, minority groups, parents, service workers, and regular citizens. We conducted both formal and informal interviews and spent additional time examining census data and local news articles to refine our information. As a group, we made every effort to represent the values of our organization and gain the truest picture of Upland by remaining un-biased and nonpartisan.

## ***What We Found***

Upland's standard of living relies on family values, maintaining a safe community, and most importantly placing a high priority on the education of their children. The city's motto reflects these values, which are clearly evident across the city. "A City of Gracious Living," rings true for many we interviewed, and we were amazed by the many ways the city considers its residents and residents consider one another. Yet we caution Upland against blindly sticking to this motto at the expense of incorporating new voices or adjusting to thrive in the face of new challenges.

### **Filling the Gaps:**

#### **Taking Mutual Responsibility for Community Needs**

The city serves its citizens through a combination of services delivered by both Upland's city government and its outstandingly engaged community. Upland is at its strongest when organizations step in and work together to fill gaps in service. One example of this is the Scheu Family YMCA's intramural basketball program. When the school system could no longer run its own program after school, the YMCA created a basketball program to serve a larger number of youth. Similarly, the St., Joseph's food bank serves thousands of individuals who are out of work or homeless each year, providing a service that the government currently does not.

Upland has an impressive history of community support for public projects as demonstrated by multiple votes to approve bonds and sales tax increase, most recently including \$100 million for bringing a 21<sup>st</sup> century classroom to every child in Upland Unified School District. To build on this tradition of mutual responsibility and continue filling gaps that exist, we urge the city to:

- Promote the concept of mutual responsibility by highlighting these and other successes of community involvement to encourage new partnerships. Celebrate community collaboration.
- Identify additional areas where the city can provide staff, resources or funding to outside organizations (such as the Community Services Department's work with after-school and summer camp programs) to support and enhance their work in serving the city's residents.
- Bring together new and existing community leaders to problem solve around persisting issues that the city cannot address within its own budget (for instance to address the 2,000 plus families who do not currently receive housing subsidies for which they are eligible). Task citizens with serving one another, as they have been successful with this in the past.
- Find places where the city government can fill gaps itself in cost-effective, simple ways. As one example, the city could easily offer resources that could potentially help the jobless or homeless citizens get back on their feet by providing these individuals with information about how to apply for government benefits or where to access health care.

### **“No entiendo ‘Gracious Living’”: Including All Voices**

Throughout the past century, Upland has succeeded in maintaining an upscale feel built on shared values, strong education and a safe environment where people can raise families. In this sense, “gracious living” is alive and well, and our group experienced it firsthand from the many individuals with whom we spoke during our stay. However, there are many citizens for whom this concept does not hold true; in fact, some are not even aware of the motto.

One critical next step for Upland is to actively and purposefully seek out the voices of disenfranchised groups and uninvolved citizenry. Bringing multiple cross-sections of individuals into the discussion of what Upland is and where it is going will ensure all citizens are served fairly and equally. The city, as well as the citizens themselves, needs to be fully aware of the issues that residents face in order to begin to develop solutions. Some city organizations have already demonstrated how to incorporate all voices successfully, and the city should expand on these efforts. A city that represents all of its citizens would parallel the YMCA's mission to serve any Upland resident, regardless of

his or her ability to pay. It would build on the incredible academic gains made across the board, by all demographics, in the public schools. To become a city that truly encompasses all voices and represents all citizens equally, we urge the city to:

- Seek out new community leaders from underrepresented groups, particularly from the Hispanic and African-American communities. Upland is 27.5% Hispanic, yet this population is not reflected in the city's elected government, which should represent the entire community. All minority groups should have a voice in decision-making spaces.
- Respond to the highest needs rather than the loudest voices. The city's new animal shelter does amazing work and stands to bring additional revenue into the city as a regional site. However, we found that other groups, such as low-income families and the homeless, could benefit from the resources that have been dedicated to the shelter.
- Develop a vibrant online presence through social networking tools such as Facebook and Twitter to reach younger populations, spur discussion between citizens, and drive traffic towards the city's clear and informative web site.
- Create more accessible opportunities for community input by holding open forum town halls, focus groups, or regular meetings in high-traffic locations to increase attendance. The most powerful person in Upland is the person who can unite the community in engaging in the political process. When this happens, you won't have to inform the citizens of your vision. You will have created it together.

### **Identity vs. Reality:**

#### **The Costs of Maintaining Gracious Living**

Upland truly regards itself as a city of gracious living. This identity is predicated on safe and clean streets, security via well-funded police and fire departments, and ongoing city beautification projects. The city's vision includes little in the way of economic development. Yet Upland is facing the same budget crisis as the rest of the state and country, as well as ongoing costs from a number of lawsuits. Upland must consider how it can afford to maintain its peaceful "bedroom community" feel, while still adjusting to meet the economic demands of the time. Ultimately, the city must let go of the financial burden of its supposed identity and adjust to meet new challenges in order to ensure sustainability in the long-term.

When we spoke with residents, we heard no less than four locations identified as the center of the city: the YMCA, the high school, City Hall, and downtown. This divergence of opinions, and the fact that there is no one evident center of the town, is representative of Upland's larger dilemma: a severe lack of commercial activity to satisfy business owners and produce revenues for the city. The current trajectory is unsustainable, and we encourage the city to:

- Explore creative options to attract new businesses and keep resident dollars local. Some ideas include redeveloping valuable land near the freeway, rerouting traffic to

move through downtown, creating multi-purpose living and commercial spaces, and working with developers to ascertain their unique ideas for how and where to expand.

- Grow and promote the Shop Upland initiative in order to keep shopping dollars within city limits. Find new ways to share the information from this campaign in places where there is high traffic (for example at a Friday night football game or church fair).
- Work with the Chamber of Commerce and business leaders in renewing partnerships that are solution-oriented and will grow business. Strategize around developing meetings that draw new voices from the business community and allow leaders to develop their own solutions to the problems they face, with city support.
- Host a series of city-wide discussions to identify a true city center. Naming a center of Upland could strengthen city pride, attract new types of business, encourage residents to spend within their own city, and help businesses attract customers.

***What We Took With Us***

In diving into Upland’s history, present and future, we saw how community engagement, collaboration, and a willingness to adjust course determine the success of a city’s self-government. We will take with us the stellar examples Upland sets for how a community can serve its needs, as well as the examples of how it must continue to change and seek out new voices to become truly representative of its citizens.

But the most important lesson we learned from our study, and the one piece of advice we urge on Upland above all others, is that the answer to a city’s logic or motto or brand is far less important than the process of discovering it. We urge the city to take our recommendations to heart, but even more to engage in this process itself. Upland should take a long and serious look at all of its citizens and their needs, its successes and its struggles, its history and its reality, to identify where it is strong and where it must grow. Only through this honest process, built on consistent communication across demographics and interests, can the city find its own logic and provide the best for all its citizens.



We feel extremely grateful to the city of Upland and its residents for their graciousness and warmth during our stay. We appreciate every honest conversation and all information and viewpoints shared, and we encourage anyone to reach out to us with further developments, questions or comments at corola2011-2012@googlegroups.com. We hope that our findings will serve to accelerate the momentum the city and its citizens already possess in strengthening Upland for the entire community, and we look forward to hearing about your developments in the months to come.

Thanks and Best Wishes,

The Los Angeles 2011-2012 Coro Fellows Class