Colleges and universities and public mental health agencies have struggled for many years to fulfill their responsibilities to meet the public need. Typically these struggles were done independently, with little awareness of the issues faced by the other sector. Public agencies on the national, state, and local levels sought to prioritize the populations for which they would provide care and to find appropriate models of administering and financing the services. Academic institutions focused on the training of human resources and basic and applied research that relate to mental disorder. Points of contact between the two institutions typically involved training placements and an occasional research project. By and large, however, they remained independent of each other and there was little dialogue between the two.

Since the early 1960s, developments in the mental health field have forged relationships between public agencies and colleges and universities. First, the development of the national community mental health centers program carried with it the designation of four core mental health professions. These were psychiatry, psychology, social work, and nursing. This designation involved a requirement that each federally funded community mental health center have at least one of each core profession on the staff. Second, funding for training these core mental health professional persons was provided by the federal government.
Initially, rather lucrative grant programs were incentives for colleges and universities to provide basic training programs in the professions. Later, in the mid to late 1970s, as funds were reduced, training grants were devoted to academic and clinical programs which served prioritized populations. Third, NIMH clinical and systems research funds have been awarded to many university-based programs, enabling both faculty and students to become involved in public-sector mental health issues.

As training funds have dwindled and community mental health centers have developed new, entrepreneurial models to cope with shifts in funding patterns, academic training programs appear to have become concerned with other issues. Davis (1987) reported that in Virginia few trainees in psychiatry, psychology, social work, or occupational therapy were interested in public sector employment. Numerous other state and community providers have echoed those findings. Relationships between public mental health institutions and academic training programs occur infrequently and attempts to interest faculty in public sector activity are frequently unsuccessful. The National Institute of Mental Health has supported linkages between the public sector and academic institutions with the Public-Academic Liaison Programs (PAL Programs). While the structure of these programs still lack refinement, they have focused an important beam of light on a critical area of concern.

This special issue of Community Mental Health Journal is devoted to public-academic linkages. The goal is to present the issue of linkages between public mental health providers and academic institutions with some models from several professional disciplines and states. The focus is essentially on the relationship between the mental health authorities in state government and academic and professional training programs. An array of papers is published to provide a sample of some of the innovative relationships that have been developed in many states.

First, Bob Paulson, a professor of social work at the University of Cincinnati, describes the current crisis in human resource development, suggests the need for strong linkages between academic programs and state government, and provides one successful example from Ohio. Second, Meredith Davis, former mental health director at the Western Interstate Consortium on Higher Education (WICHE) in Boulder, CO., discusses the WICHE program that has been on the forefront of linkages for at least a decade. She summarizes WICHE's progress and points to its future. Third, John Talbott, James Bray, Lois Flaherty, Carolyn Robinowitz, and Zebulon Taintor describe their innovative Pew Memorial Trust Program for developing state-university