

**SLS****TEACHING  
TOOLKIT**

## University Barbershop: A Case Study

**Time Commitment:**  
30-60 mins**Type:** Reading;  
Discussion; Take-home  
assignment**Big Ideas:** Asset-based  
Community Development;  
Community Asset Mapping

### **OVERVIEW:**

The University Barbershop stands at the corner of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Drive and James P Brawley Drive in Atlanta, GA. Established in 1956, it is one of the oldest barbershops in America. Today, it remains an important center where local boys find mentorship, and patrons find community. In this case study, barber LaTeef Majaliwa contemplates the unique position of University Barbershop, and wonders how he can strength community impact while also meeting the economic needs of the barbershop and its employees.

Serve-Learn-Sustain interprets sustainable communities as integrated systems, wherein environmental, economic, and social factors all inform each other. As you read this case study, consider these terms as discreet factors, but also as connected.

This tool was contributed by Prof. Bob Myers and University Barbershop barber LaTeef Majaliwa.

### **INSTRUCTIONS:**

1. Use this case study in the way that works best for your class: assign it as a take-home reading, or as an in-class reading.
2. Either as a take-home assignment, or in-class discussion, answer the Discussion Questions, or craft your own.

### **SLS STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES & ASSESSMENT**

The Serve-Learn-Sustain toolkit teaching tools are designed to help students achieve not only SLS student learning outcomes (SLOs), but the unique learning outcomes for your own courses. Reflection, concept maps, rubrics, and other assessment methods are shown to improve student learning. For resources on how to assess your students' work, please review our Assessment Tools at <http://serve-learn-sustain.gatech.edu/tool-category/assessment>.

**This tool achieves SLOs 1, 3, 5, 6. See the end of this tool for further details.**

### **Want Help?**

Bob Myers is the contact for this tool. You can reach her at [robert.myers@gatech.edu](mailto:robert.myers@gatech.edu)



# A Case Study

## Introduction

At the corner of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Drive and James P Brawley Drive sits one of the oldest barbershops in America: University Barbershop, established in 1956. It is often busy and today is no exception. One of its barbers, LaTeef, is sitting in the waiting area prior to his next appointment. Two boys named Kymo and Kyree come in with smiles on their faces. They live in the neighborhood and frequently come by to visit. Several boys do this and LaTeef uses these encounters to help mentor. LaTeef immediately asks about a lemonade stand the boys have been running. Kyree responds that another boy has already setup with lemonade in Kyree's usual spot. Kyree has not opened yet as he is in need of cups and ice. LaTeef inquires why they don't have their products, then advises Kyree not to spend all their profit because they will need it for supplies in the future. LaTeef promises to buy a cup once the boys are up and running. They finish talking and Kymo and Kyree run out.

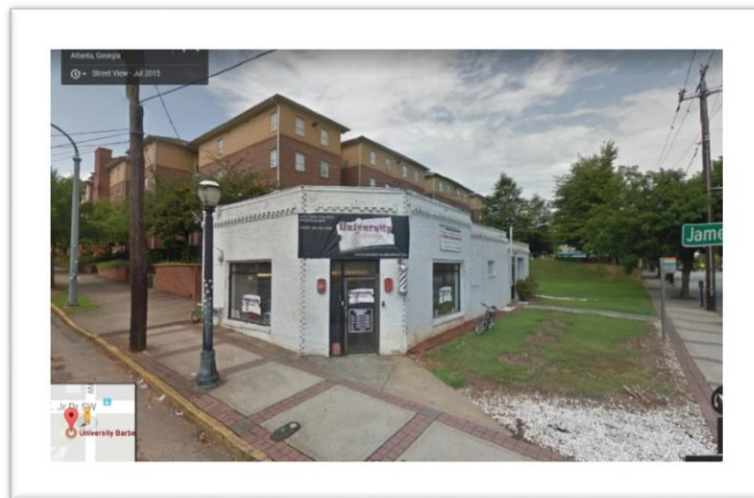
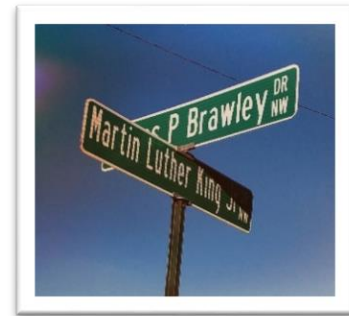


Figure 1: University Barbershop

LaTeef begins to think about what more he could do to help these boys and others in the community. He has already created an environment where many boys come by just to talk. In addition, he has long dreamed of opening a barber school. What would it take to start a barber school in this neighborhood? Is there another product that Kymo and Kyree can sell that has similar overhead as lemonade?

## History

Established in 1965, University Barbershop is located in the Atlanta University Center just over ½ mile west of the Mercedes Benz Stadium. Across the street from the shop is the original home of West Hunter Street Baptist Church. This was the former church of Civil Rights icon Ralph David Abernathy Jr. The building also served as a location for many meetings involving the formation of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). Unfortunately, it has sat boarded up and desolate since the early 1970's, trailed by rumors of a possible wax museum or pub. In 2014 the National Park Service began a study to determine if it should be designated as a unit of the national park system. Ralph David Abernathy III's estate is trying to raise \$3.5 Million to build a plaza outside the church that would include statues of Abernathy's mother and father.

Across the street from the barbershop, and next door to the church, there is a newer strip plaza anchored by a Walmart Supercenter. The plaza has a Beauty Supply store, Atlanta Police Department mini precinct, a MetroPCS store and BTJ Wings restaurant, but no barbershop.

Behind the barbershop sits the Clark Atlanta University campus. During the school year, students make up the majority that patronize University Barbershop as it is the closest shop to campus. The shop benefits from the walk by traffic to Walmart and the other restaurants on MLK Jr. Drive. Clark's Homecoming and the parades that come with the season afford the barbershop a great deal of visibility.

In addition to University Barbershop, there are six other barbershops in a 1/3 mile stretch along MLK Jr. Drive:

1. Bobby's Barbershop
2. Upper Cuts Barbershop
3. Phillies Finest Barbershop
4. K.O. Barber Beauty and more
5. Pro Cuts and D Schaup & Salon

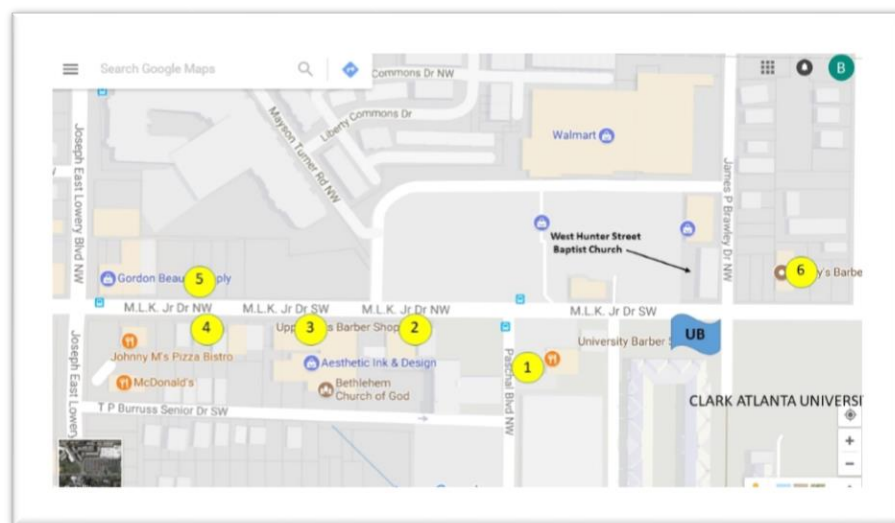


Figure 2. Barbershops on MLK Jr Dr. near University Barbershop (UB)

Over the years, many famous people have patronized University

Barbershop, including Mayor Andrew Young, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Ralph David Abernathy Jr., Presidents of Clark Atlanta University, and a variety of professional athletes

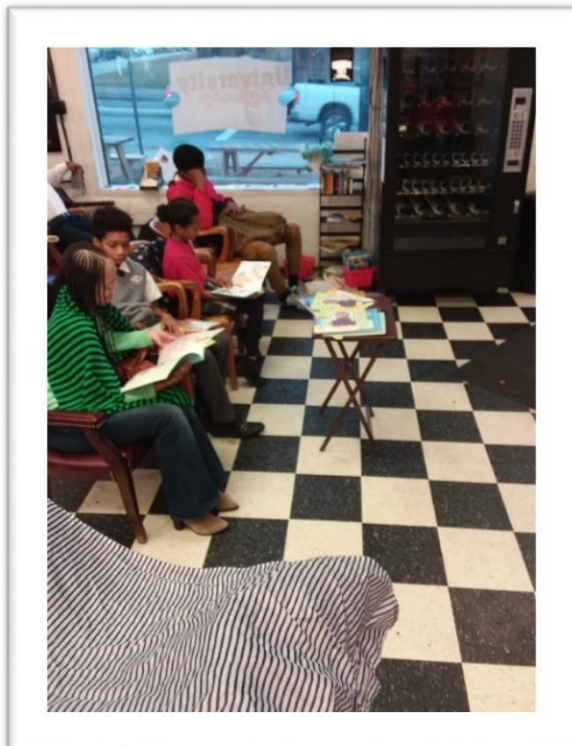
including local favorites like Tashard Choice, Derrick Morgan, Michael Johnson and Calvin Johnson (Go Jackets!).

To cater to female clientele, a section of the establishment was walled off for use as a Beauty Salon. Currently one hairstylist operates the salon area. In addition to three stylist chairs, there is also a sink for shampoos and built-in hair dryers. This allows women a sense of privacy from the larger male section.

In the main room are five barber chairs along one wall and a separate station opposite. Next to the single station are two rows of wooden chairs that face a TV on the wall. This is where customers can wait and watch TV or talk. By the window is a bookshelf full of children's books including some coloring books. This section was provided by the Children's Museum for a program to encourage reading. Above that is another TV with an Xbox.



Figure 3. The University Barbershop. Hours of operation: Mon-Thu 9:00 am – 8:00 pm; Fri-Sat 8:00 am – 8:00 pm. Closed on Sunday



The shop's mode of operations is booth rental. Each barber and the hairstylist pay a weekly chair/booth rental of \$200. The single station along the opposite wall has a part-time barber who pays \$100/week. This weekly rental fee gives them exclusive use of a specific chair. Working as independent contractors, barbers choose the hours they cut and they are responsible for their own appointments and clients. Walk-in customers are handled informally and are usually given to the newer barbers to help them build their client base. Walk-ins are first-come-first-serve and generally patronize the first barber available.

LaTeef has been a tonsorial artist for over twenty years, beginning in Chicago. In 1998, he moved to Atlanta to continue his trade. Coming from Gwinnett County to Downtown

Atlanta in 200 to work on Mitchell St. across from the Courthouse sparked a nearly two-decade commitment to serve the Atlanta community.

In 2005 LaTeef took his trade to the Buckhead community for a different experience. This exclusive barbershop operated on 50/50 commission yet offered other amenities to its patrons. He opened the Dokter's Office barbershop in the Vine City community in 2006. Having learned from his experiences, the new venture exposed LaTeef to the benefits of a business being active within the community it serves. He now uses his trade participate in different community initiatives from mentoring youth to Fatherhood classes and NPU (Neighborhood Planning Unit) meetings. NPU is a city hall initiative to give different neighborhoods in Atlanta a voice to the city council, primarily to discuss land use.

## Barbers in Georgia

In 2012, there were 1,144 licensed barbers in the state of Georgia. Annual salaries vary from a low of \$38k in less desirable areas like Athens (cough) to a high of \$51k in Atlanta (Go Jackets!).

Barbers must be licensed in the state under the Georgia Board of Barbers. To obtain a license to legally practice the tonsorial arts, one must graduate from a Georgia Barber College with 1,500 hours of specialized training or log 3,000 hours of training as an apprentice. For either, barbers must pass a written national theory exam and a practical exam. Georgia also provides reciprocity for licensing obtained in other states with similar requirements. A license is valid for 2 years and must be renewed on December 31<sup>st</sup> of even-numbered years. In order to teach the trade a barber must complete an instructors course at an accredited barber school, which includes an additional 1,500 hours.

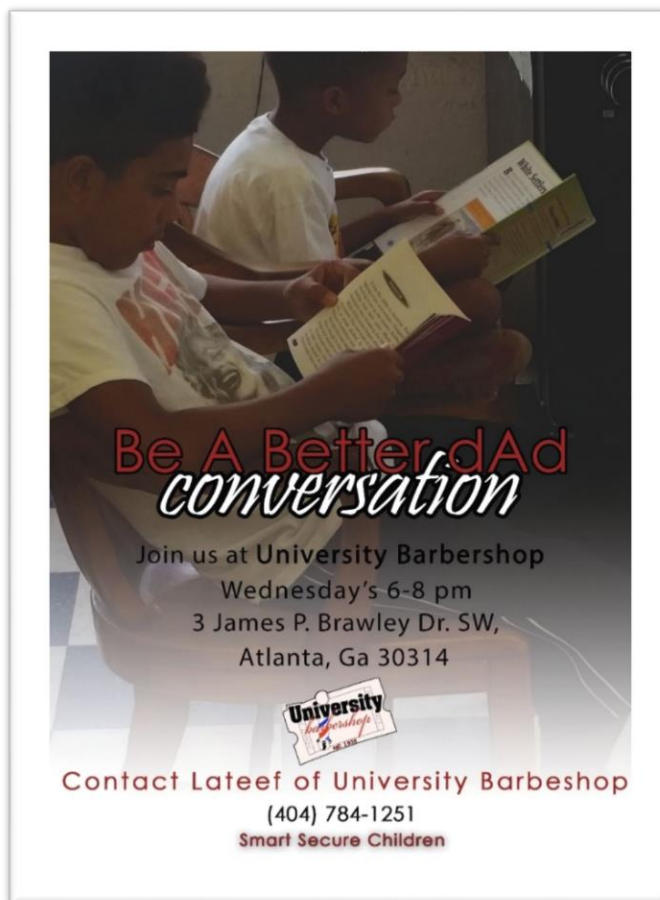
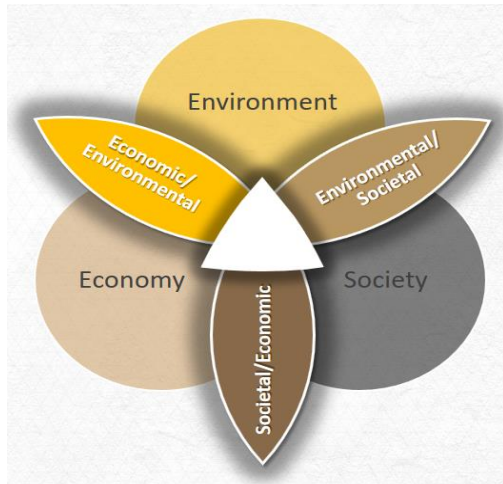


Figure 4. An advertisement for a community event held at University Barbershop.



Serve-Learn Sustain interprets sustainable communities as integrated systems, wherein environmental, economic, and social factors all inform each other. As you read this case study, consider these terms as discreet factors, but also as connected. Ask yourself, how does the economy impact the environment? How does the environment affect society?

## The Future of University Barbershop: Discussion Questions

Just as the two boys exit, an older man named Sam walks past the empty vending machines and sits down. He provides “street news” and talks about everything from newscaster Monica Pearson to the Falcons and their connection to local politics. He is very entertaining and opinionated and draws a lot of laughter from both the barbers and patrons. Again, LaTeef’s mind wanders: *There has to be a way to strengthen our impact in the community while generating other income outside of haircuts. Leverage our historical value to maximize on the earning potential of the building.* As a businessman, five things keep coming up:

1. Is there a different business model that would be more conducive to the barbers and the shop? He has worked for both commission-based shops and booth rental. Each has its pros and cons. Could there be a better model?
2. Are there things he could do to improve efficiency? How could he get more cuts per day without sacrificing the experience for the customer? Should he alter his business hours?
3. Are there any other revenue opportunities he could or should pursue? Nonprofit?
4. What would it take to open a barber school in the area and make it the place to learn the trade? How would that fit in with University Barbershop?
5. Is there a service that University Barbershop could offer to the other barbers on the Westside?

## SLS Student Learning Outcomes

### Goal 1: Develop Skills & Knowledge

1. Identify relationships among ecological, social, and economic systems
2. Describe how actions affect community sustainability
3. Work effectively in different communities
4. Analyze the impact of decisions on community sustainability

### Goal 2: Connect to Professional Practice

5. Relate discipline to community sustainability

### Goal 3: Work in Diverse Contexts

6. Create and evaluate approaches to addressing community sustainability
7. Communicate with the public about sustainable communities

### Goal 4: Build Long-Lasting Values and Beliefs

8. Manifest personal values and beliefs demonstrating responsible community membership