Overview

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Guest Editor

Metropolitan Universities was created to help define, describe, and develop the concept of an institutional mission that transcends locality. These are special universities whose teaching, research, and service are intended to bring distinctive benefits to their communities. The classic metropolitan university is publicly supported, exists in a major metropolitan area, maintains liberal admissions standards, has a populist mission, appeals to minority faculty and students, and by common understanding is not of the elite corps in higher education.

Our students are among the first in their families to attend college; come from the lower socioeconomic strata; work to afford even the low costs of public institutions; and expect little delay between commencement day and gainful employment. Our classes are mixtures of the well- and ill-prepared, the streetwise and grammar foolish. I once told an external reviewer that my ambition for the program under review was to make it one of the best in the public urban senior universities. He expressed sympathy to the faculty for a dean with such low expectations. May I dedicate this edition to this elite Mr. Chips, who has much to learn about our—and his own—university?

The common concerns of all universities were much on my mind as I began to assemble articles for this edition, focused on the curriculum of metropolitan universities. If the curriculum does not reflect its university's mission, then something is wrong with either the curriculum or the mission. But why should there be something special about the curriculum of any genuine university? In this and other issues, this journal has declared (see "Declaration of Metropolitan Universities") "the creation, interpretation, dissemination, and application of knowledge" to be the "fundamental functions" of metropolitan universities. This certainly means that we must teach students English and history and philosophy; physics and biology and mathematics; political science and sociology and psychology; to say nothing of the law and medicine and business and the myriad combinations of undergraduate and graduate and professional programs that dot the landscape of American campuses big to little, rural to urban, public to private, frugal to costly.

But, of course, the problem was not the scarcity of finding programs that reflect the distinction of metropolitan universities. Instead we had to limit the numbers of special stories that could be fit into one edition, so varied are the tales about why and how and what we teach in metropolitan universities. But what is it that distinguishes these programs? Academic traditions are ready tests for the commonality of programs that, to quote the Declaration, fulfill the "fundamental functions" that "define all universities and colleges." But academic tradition is not the hallmark of the metropolitan university's uniqueness. Tradition discourages novelty, innovation, and the rapid adaptation to change; our universities are remarkable for timely, innovative responses to the changing needs of our constituencies. It is not that we have invented new disciplines or discovered novel cognitive receptors or created new definitions of education. It is that we are charged with the responsibility

of adapting fundamentals to the ceaseless demands of a changing world. If pressed for a single descriptor to these stories, I would propose "Metropolitan Universities—the First to Respond."

First, David Potter and Arthur Chickering set the broad context for the theme of responsiveness by describing bold new ideas for reshaping universities to fit the evolving pattern of "urban villages." Their ideas range from the geography and structure of the distributed multicampus to extensions of those critiques of traditional teaching and learning that have characterized the evolution of the metropolitan university. They remind us that the outreach of metropolitan universities is not intended as a token offered from main campus to remote site, but as a reaction of substance and value to the unique needs of what is within the proper reach of such universities.

Jennifer Haworth and Clifton Conrad's article on liberating education comes next because it adds a proper caution lest responsiveness be confused with mindless change. If the elite Mr. Chips has a peg on which to hang his mortarboard, it is the suspicion that "by attempting to be all things to all people many metropolitan universities have compromised their integrity as intellectual centers of liberal learning." Haworth and Conrad probably will not persuade all readers of the "illiberalism" of their universities, but only the very stubborn will resist contemplating their recipe for revitalizing or maintaining—depending on one's viewpoint—liberal education in metropolitan universities.

There follows a series of articles that flesh out this framework. Jonathan Kamholtz's "Urban Georgic" is a tale about the urban dweller, continuing education, and the "romance of making fresh starts...to weave together into a coherent whole the unraveled threads of academic false starts and changed majors...." Carolyn Adams reverses the ordinary concept of the urban laboratory into that of an exciting educational laboratory, and this might just bring out of the closet some curriculum committee members who have wondered secretly if tradition has unduly barred the "real world" from the classroom. Similarly, Sharon Rubin gathers together diverse programs in social responsibility, once confined to extracurricular activities, and roots them into the curriculum where they may confidently develop into an essential of a liberal education.

John Means gives an example of creative relief for resource quandaries through an accommodation with the technology that can sustain low-enrollment courses in the curriculum. Jack Greene's article on curricular design for a Streets Department program describes another pattern that emerges from still one more shift of our institutional prisms, and suggests another way that academic traditions may be stretched without breaking their infrastructure.

A brief digression. A few summers ago I spent time in some of the finest board rooms in Philadelphia, asking chief executive officers what they wanted from the next generation of Temple's graduates. In an era marked by high technology and low profit, I expected to hear about silicon chips, market tips, capital gain dips, free market flips, and other reminders that arts and science deans, like salmon, must swim upstream to deposit their precious spawn. Instead I learned that neither

the arts and sciences nor professional schools may be building the degrees that will transport our graduates toward the favorable side of the famous net worth ledger that records the value of a college education. I asked one of the executives I interviewed, George Huddleston, to write a prescription for a partnership between business and universities that would make us at least face squarely what we may be rejecting through our allegiance to academic customs.

In part, the executive narrative simply describes a hybrid who can write and speak and do sums and has a nodding acquaintance with accounting and marketing skills. Because most of our students do not follow their undergraduate degrees with professional or graduate education, it is essential that we help them meet their expectations for improved employment opportunities through a college degree. But the plot is not that simple. These executives spoke of cultural sensitivity, of marketplace ethics, of teamwork, of responsibility. They made me wonder if the corollary to a four-year celebration of the individual intellect is communal nescience, and sent me scrambling back to campus to contemplate how much of what we do, including our own doctoral training, encourages intellectual fragmentation and self-indulgence instead of coherence and the common good. These are problems that transcend socioeconomic sectors and institutional missions and represent some of the universal concerns about modern higher education.

A briefer digression. I spend a fair amount of time on other campuses—consulting, counseling, conferring, and kibitzing. Some of these places are unicultural, well endowed, fourth and fifth generation, selective, and expensive. All are struggling with educational reforms; with the balance between teaching and research; with the issue of societal diversity; with the barriers of disciplinarianism; with the place of social responsibility; with the education and recruitment of minorities; with the nontraditional student; with the marketing of the liberal arts and the liberalization of marketing. There are times when I wondered why I ever left home.

Metropolitan universities are pioneers in the recognition of major flaws in the educational system and in programs to correct those flaws. We are still a long way from the right to congratulate ourselves on having effectively challenged the critics of a higher educational system that graduates an increasing proportion of our population without any apparent decrease in society's problems. But I suspect that the metropolitan university may be closer to meaningful reform than others. I have a growing sense of the wondrous consequences of a mission that forces us to displace tradition as the centerpiece of programmatic decisions. Blended with our embrace of "the historical values and principles that define all universities and colleges," if we are sufficiently cautious to avoid mindless pandering to constituencies, and sufficiently wise to elevate our responses to the summit of higher education, we will earn our place at the head table, coaching Mr. Chips in the reform of an educational system that is as current as any legacy that is perpetually rededicated in the image of its creators.