*John Melville*

# Charting the Future of the Constrained Metropolitan University

***Due to a combination of economic, social, and political forces, a generation of* constrained metropolitan universities *has been created across the United States. These institutions operate with the borrowed traditions of the research university, under imposed financial and political constraints, and amidst growing societal expectations. In the future these institutions will take one of three paths. They will settle reluctantly for marginal change, grapple unsuccessfully with multiple missions, or take an historic step to become a new kind of institution: a Metropolitan Grant University with a unique identity akin to that of the land-grant university.***

## Evolution of the Constrained Metropolitan University

Since World War II, a new generation of institutions has evolved to meet the growing demands of a new metropolitan America. Most of these institutions were created by reconstituting and expanding existing educational programs in a metropolitan area—transforming small private colleges and universities, extension programs from the state's nonmetropolitan flagship university, state teachers' colleges, and the like into new public universities.

Not surprisingly, these new institutions were heavily influenced by the educational components from which they were assembled. Because their states already had established a major public flagship university in a rural or suburban location, these new universities were never expected to reach the stature of the nonmetropolitan flagship university of their states. Even in states with very large underserved metropolitan areas like Illinois and Wisconsin, new metropolitan universities, such as the University of Illinois-Chicago and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, were expected to be subordinate to the public flagship university of the state. Only recently have these institutions moved closer in prestige to their states' flagship universities.

Because these institutions primarily evolved from preexisting educational programs or institutions that were clearly of small or secondary significance

within the state, they began with low prestige and an institutional culture already accustomed to "second-class" status within the state's higher education system. At the same time, endowed with the traditional structures and incentives of their more prestigious and well-established counterparts, these new institutions were constrained financially and politically from ever evolving into the kind of institution, a comprehensive research university, that their borrowed structures and incentives would have naturally produced.

To complicate matters, amidst these borrowed traditions and imposed constraints, new expectations began to be placed on these institutions. With the growing number and complexity of metropolitan problems, these universities were called on to play a more direct role in the development of practical solutions. With growing educational demands from previously underrepresented minority groups, these institutions were asked not only to ease access, but actively recruit new kinds of students and meet their complex array of academic and nonacademic needs. With the growing diversity of metropolitan populations and quickening pace of occupational and societal change, these universities were called on to provide new kinds of educational services tailored to the schedules, learning abilities, and specific interests of nontraditional students.

Over the years, some of these institutions have done better than others in reconciling borrowed traditions, imposed constraints, and growing expectations. Some have benefited from entrepreneurial leadership that has succeeded in building areas of educational and research excellence within existing constraints. Some institutions have received special funding from their states to meet local needs for metropolitan research or establish applied degree programs to train people for occupations typically in high demand in metropolitan areas, such as social work and city planning. Some have been successful in filling niches left open by private universities in their region or the state's nonmetropolitan flagship university. As a result, some institutions have developed selected programs comparable in research funding, quality, and prestige to the best ones at traditional comprehensive research universities.

Despite such achievements, these institutions generally remain overwhelmed by local demand, seriously constrained by outside forces, and repeatedly criticized for either not doing enough or for doing too much. Confronted with such a Catch-22 situation, these institutions are susceptible to faculty demoralization, institutional defensiveness, and poor community image. Constrained from playing the unique, multifaceted, and nontraditional role that is necessary in today's metropolitan setting, an institution of this kind can appropriately be termed a *Constrained Metropolitan University.*

## One of Three Likely Futures

Because of the strong pressures building in metropolitan areas for diverse and high-quality education and research, change at constrained public metropolitan universities is unavoidable. However, institutional

change will either be marginal or major depending on the local demand, state finances, and political will. The three possible futures facing the public metropolitan university are described below and summarized in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Possible Futures for the Constrained Metropolitan University**

| Future #1: The Marginal Change Scenario | Future #2: The Multiple Mission Scenario | Future #3: The Metropolitan Grant Scenario |
|---|---|---|
| Course of least resistance.<br><br>Will not alter traditional structures and incentives.<br><br>Some transfer or duplication of programs with strong metropolitan dimension from rural flagship universities.<br><br>Many states will choose this option to avoid politically difficult or economically costly alternatives. | An attempt to be all things to all people.<br><br>Will not alter traditional structures and incentives.<br><br>Institutions will have difficulty pursuing either mission effectively.<br><br>Few states will allow multiple missions because of financial and political reasons. | Most difficult option but biggest potential payoff.<br><br>Will differ significantly in structure and incentives from today's constrained metropolitan and comprehensive research universities.<br><br>Some visionary states and universities may follow this course together. |

## *Future #1: The Marginal Change Scenario*

Because change in higher education has been historically difficult, it is likely that many states and institutions will follow the course of least resistance by making only marginal changes in constrained metropolitan universities. These changes are likely to be an attempt to try to meet the most pressing metropolitan needs, but will fall far short of what is necessary for the metropolitan area. Moreover, these changes are not likely to challenge seriously the overall structures, priorities, and incentives within the university.

For states that have a constrained metropolitan university in their largest metropolitan area, marginal change will likely focus on specific programs. The more fundamental problems facing this kind of institution, involving borrowed traditions, imposed constraints, and rising expectations, will not be resolved. In states where the largest metropolitan area is growing particularly fast, community demand will likely be funneled into pressure for either the transfer or duplication of certain programs based at the state's nonmetropolitan flagship and/or land-grant university. The programs most likely to be targeted first will be those that seem to benefit from close proximity to a metropolitan area, programs such as social work, journalism, architecture, and business.

This process has already begun across the country. For example, the University of Colorado-Boulder recently transferred its public administration, environmental design, and two graduate education programs to its metropolitan counterpart in Denver. Illinois, a state with more resources, has tended to duplicate programs at its fast-growing University of Illinois-Chicago rather than transfer programs from the flagship university in rural Champaign. Although in most states nonmetropolitan flagship universities will still strongly oppose either program transfer or duplication, some restructuring is likely to take place in virtually every state.

### *Future #2: The Multiple Missions Scenario*

Those public metropolitan universities that push beyond marginal changes will most likely try to assume multiple missions. They will attempt to meet not only the most pressing metropolitan needs, but try to assume responsibility for meeting a broad range of statewide and local metropolitan needs. However, because of the strong traditions borrowed from the comprehensive research university model, these institutions will find it difficult if not impossible to adapt the existing structures, priorities, and incentives within the university to pursue multiple missions effectively. The result will likely be institutional overload: some constrained metropolitan universities will try to be all things to all people and find that they cannot pursue any of their multiple missions effectively.

As the history of postsecondary education has shown, the tendency of universities that undertake (or are forced to accept) a new mission is to add new organizational structures alongside traditional structures without altering the latter significantly. Faced with this challenge, many constrained metropolitan universities are likely to try to layer a new mission or set of missions onto their traditional mission. But, as recent experience has also shown, those universities that have pursued multiple missions usually find that different missions cannot be easily isolated, that it is inevitable that some intermingling, some clash of traditional and new institutional cultures, takes place.

Typically, while some in the academic community push for the comprehensive research university model, others are genuinely concerned that the local mission of their public metropolitan university will be diminished or overwhelmed by new institutional priorities. Some fear that locally relevant research and more applied educational programs will be given lower priority than national or internationally focused research or more academic educational programs. If past experience is any indication, these fears appear to be well founded.

If constrained metropolitan universities are both given the financial and political means to become comprehensive research universities while trying to keep their local missions intact, they too will become susceptible to the consequences of pursuing multiple missions. The University of Illinois-Chicago, once a prime example of a constrained metropolitan university, is a good example of this phenomenon.

Even as it has grown in prestige in traditional higher education circles and within the Chicago community as an emerging comprehensive research university, the institution has also come under fire for neglecting aspects of its local mission. Although the university has been commended for progress in basic research and graduate education, concerns have been raised about a precipitous decline in black enrollment and decreasing emphasis on undergraduate education. These are some of the same concerns often raised about traditional comprehensive research universities.

Although these issues are still being debated, the University of Illinois-Chicago experience seems consistent with that of similar constrained metropolitan universities that have tried to pursue multiple missions or tried to reconcile conflicting organizational goals and incentives. In each case, traditional structures, goals, and incentives have eventually prevailed in the inevitable struggle among multiple missions.

The State University of New York-Buffalo and the University of California-Santa Cruz offer good examples of this phenomenon. Both attempted during the 1960s to overlay new academic structures and priorities (i.e., strong multidisciplinary colleges especially concerned with high-quality undergraduate education) onto traditional structures and priorities (i.e., discipline-based departments especially concerned with high-quality basic research). The result: by the end of the 1970s, the new academic structures either disappeared or were stripped of real influence regarding budgets, faculty appointments, and program development at both universities.

Regardless of the possibilities, the number of instances in which a constrained metropolitan university will be allowed to pursue a comprehensive research university mission is apt to remain small. Massive resistance from state policy makers and nonmetropolitan flagship university leaders will continue to forestall any serious changes in the mission of constrained metropolitan universities in most states. In smaller states, the added obstacle of having far fewer resources than larger states will likely make resistance to this kind of change virtually insurmountable.

## *Future #3: The* Metropolitan Grant *Scenario*

Some public metropolitan universities may restructure their mission, organizational design, incentives, and reward system and transform themselves into a new kind of institution. With the strong traditions of postsecondary education, universities that pursue this future will likely be the exception rather than the rule. A few visionaries may experiment, fail, try again, enjoy some success, and through trial and error gradually develop a new institutional model: the *Metropolitan Grant University.*

As Figure 2 suggests, the new Metropolitan Grant University will differ from its constrained metropolitan university counterpart in a number of important ways. The new model will differ in overall orga-

nizational goals, structure, and flexibility; faculty composition and rewards; research and service orientations; and educational approach.

**Figure 2: Comparison of the Constrained and Metropolitan Grant Models**

| Key Characteristics | Constrained Metropolitan University | Metropolitan Grant University |
|---|---|---|
| Organizational Goals, Structure, and Flexibility | Local metropolitan mission, but with conflicting goals, structures, and incentives. | Local metropolitan mission, with consistent goals, structure, and incentives. |
| | Structure and incentives without the autonomy and resources of the comprehensive research university. | Structure, incentives, autonomy, and resources to play a comprehensive metropolitan role. |
| | Never given land-grant responsibilities and seldom given any statewide role. | Given metropolitan grant responsibilities—assisting smaller metropolitan areas across the state; counterpart of state land-grant university. |
| | Organized into traditional departments, with some multidisciplinary research institutes. | Organized into nontraditional, multidisciplinary units reflecting complex nature of metropolitan area problems and educational challenges. |
| Faculty Composition and Rewards | Mostly Ph.D. faculty, with some part-time instructors drawn from local community. | Rich diversity of Ph.D. faculty and high-quality experts from local community and beyond. |
| | Faculty rewarded for research of national, international, and local importance; teaching and service given somewhat higher priority than at comprehensive research universities. | Faculty rewarded most highly for locally focused research, research that draws local implications from global developments, innovative teaching, and a real commitment to local service. |
| Research and Service Orientation | Sometimes research and service overlap in best examples of interaction with local area; rewards are greater for research than local service activities. | Research and service are combined in a larger definition of scholarship, a broad set of activities that are expected of the institution and its faculty. |
| Educational Approach | Teaching heavily reliant on traditional lecture format; approaches more appropriate for young adults; student body very heterogeneous; limited student support services offered due to severe financial constraints. | Holistic approach to serving the student—one that actively recruits, retains, and enables students to reach their educational goals; metropolitan emphasis pervasive throughout curriculum. |

## New Organizational Goals, Structure, and Flexibility

The overall organizational goals, structure, and flexibility of the Metropolitan Grant University will sharply differ from its traditional counterparts. Most significantly, it will be an "open" institution in terms of interaction with its metropolitan constituencies. Deep com-

munity involvement in the planning and implementation of educational programs and research agendas will be a hallmark of the institution. Administrators and faculty members will be expected to actively reach out to the community in everything they do. The institution will be expected to build coalitions with community organizations, other local universities, and the state's nonmetropolitan flagship university easily and often.

In addition, the Metropolitan Grant University will have responsibility for helping metropolitan areas across the state, much as its traditional counterpart—the land-grant university—has been given responsibility for assisting rural areas of the state. By meeting its local metropolitan mission effectively, the new institution will have much to share with smaller metropolitan areas across the state. New partnerships will be organized by the Metropolitan Grant University with other universities and colleges focusing on a variety of metropolitan challenges.

This *metropolitan grant* role will be explicitly recognized by state legislatures and, perhaps, even the federal government. Federal legislation for *urban grant universities* has been approved, but funds have yet to be authorized to implement this concept. With or without federal funds, states will recognize the importance of making special funds available to enable the Metropolitan Grant University to play this new role effectively just as special funds are set aside to enable the state's land-grant university to play its unique role. States with a number of large metropolitan areas may designate more than one institution as a Metropolitan Grant University.

Some states have already taken steps in this direction. For example, Ohio has financed a comprehensive statewide effort through the University of Cincinnati to improve metropolitan schools. The Metropolitan Initiatives Program has been developed in conjunction with Central State University and Cuyahoga Community College to eliminate language deficiencies through the creation of new curriculum, the training of teachers in that new curriculum, and the interaction of universities with metropolitan public schools and community groups statewide.

Internally, the new Metropolitan Grant University will be organized into multidisciplinary groups that reflect more the real nature of metropolitan problems and educational challenges than loyalties to narrow disciplines or traditional arrangements. These groupings will be in constant flux, adjusting easily to rapid changes in demand and the nature of occupations and academic fields.

The overarching organizational goal will be to pursue *a distinctively local mission without becoming overly provincial.* This balance will be achieved by drawing local implications from global innovations through research, teaching, and service to the community. Thus, the value of the institution will be not only as the community's best resource for directly analyzing, communicating, and pursuing *local* needs, problems, and challenges, but also as the community's source of interpretation of global developments in every field. This emphasis will enable the university to be a national resource on metropolitan education and re-

search, building the institution's national prestige and perhaps attracting additional federal and corporate research and education funding.

## New Faculty Composition and Rewards

The faculty of the Metropolitan Grant University will be different in its composition and expectations. Individuals who are interested in educating diverse student bodies, conducting research on local concerns or on the local implications of global developments, and interacting extensively with their counterparts outside academe will be naturally attracted to the new institution. As a result, individuals with traditional degrees will be joined on the faculty by those who have demonstrated their expertise in other ways (e.g., through work experience, government service).

The reward structure for the faculty will be the key ingredient encouraging innovative institutional development. In promotion or tenure decisions, the value placed on locally relevant research will be substantial. Teaching success will be given a high priority. The level of interaction with the community in service as well as research and teaching will be highly rewarded. The faculty reward structure may be the biggest difference between this model and traditional models of universities. Despite claims that research, teaching, and service are given equal priority, promotion and tenure decisions at comprehensive research universities are for the most part based on achievement in research. Unfortunately, that is the case as well in many metropolitan universities that follow either the *marginal change* or the *multiple mission* scenario.

***The faculty reward structure may be the biggest difference between this model and traditional models of universities.***

## New Research and Service Orientations

The new Metropolitan Grant University will be guided by a new definition of scholarship. The research and service missions of traditional institutions will be difficult to separate at the Metropolitan Grant University. A large collection of activities—some involving basic or applied research, some involving consulting, some involving innovative educational experiments—would be given the recognition they deserve as important contributions to the general knowledge and specific problem-solving capacities of the metropolitan area.

To ensure that a new definition of scholarship really guides the development of the institution, appropriate ways of documenting and assessing quality will be required. The necessary tools and measures have only begun to be developed. Thus, the new Metropolitan Grant University will immediately become the leading institution in this area of inquiry because its distinctive identity will require that methods are improved for measuring a broader definition of scholarship.

## New Educational Approach

The final major area in which the new Metropolitan Grant University will be different from its traditional counterparts is in educational approach. As mentioned above, teaching itself will be much more highly valued (and rewarded) in the new institution. Effective teaching will involve more than good content, but good delivery as well. But effective teaching will not be enough. The institution will strive for a holistic educational approach—one that actively recruits, retains through effective teaching and support services, and ultimately enables students to reach their desired educational goal, whether it is a degree, certificate, or simply the completion of a course or the honing of a new skill.

One key aspect of this integrated approach will be an emphasis on effective articulation. The Metropolitan Grant University will work closely with local private and community colleges to ensure smooth transfer of students into the university. Special trouble-shooting assistance will also be available to help a diverse population of new and returning students prepare for and successfully enroll in the institution.

The university will also place emphasis on a wide array of student services reflecting the diversity of needs of the metropolitan student population. Skills assessment, remedial education, counseling, mentoring, and innovative educational delivery can lower academic barriers to educational achievement. Information, admissions assistance, financial aid, and child care services can remove some of the nonacademic hurdles.

To encourage maximum flexibility and innovation, the new Metropolitan Grant University will be distinguished by its joint emphasis on degree and nondegree programs of high quality. The institution will raise the traditional continuing education function to a new level of prestige by demanding high quality and expecting full-time, tenured professors to participate along with part-time faculty drawn from the community.

The university will also be committed to offering a variety of educational experiences, including the integration of academic and nonacademic activities. Like Northeastern University in Massachusetts, the new Metropolitan Grant University will experiment with cooperative educational options in which students earn a baccalaureate degree by alternating years between study and paid employment in business, schools, hospitals, and social service and government agencies. Additional options will be encouraged and will develop according to what works well for specific programs.

Another hallmark of the educational approach of the new Metropolitan Grant University will be its emphasis on metropolitan concepts and applications in all of its curriculum. The metropolitan experience will figure prominently, not only in professional education, but in liberal arts fields that traditionally have focused less on relevant issues from the local environment.

The University of Massachusetts-Boston is an example of an institution that is attempting to infuse a pervasive interest in the local metropolitan environment throughout its curriculum. Courses with a metropolitan emphasis are found across the university's departments:

Problems of Metropolitan Education, Biology of Cities, Metropolitan Environmental Problems, History of Boston, Geography of Housing, and the Concept of Culture and Study of the City, to name just a few.

With these new directions, the educational approach pursued by the Metropolitan Grant University will be more ambitious than that of most other four-year postsecondary education institutions. With a diverse student population and a multitude of research and service opportunities, the resources required to meet the needs of metropolitan areas effectively will have to be comparable or greater than the teaching resources required at other public universities.

## Likely Candidates for Change

Some states will be more prone than others to encourage the development of this new kind of metropolitan university. Larger states with multiple public universities in their major metropolitan areas (e.g., California) will be more likely to encourage clearer mission differentiation between one kind of metropolitan university, such as the University of California-Berkeley, and another, San Francisco State University, for example. Larger states that can afford to build a completely new metropolitan university will have a similar opportunity. In both cases, major institutional change in these states will be seen less as a zero-sum game than a genuine effort to make both kinds of institutions stronger.

In contrast, those states whose only major public university in its largest metropolitan area is a flagship university, such as Washington, are apt to witness the strongest opposition to major institutional restructuring. In these states, any attempt to restructure significantly the metropolitan flagship university will be correctly seen as an effort to sacrifice a unique statewide resource to meet local metropolitan needs. Only states that can afford to build a completely new public institution in their largest metropolitan center will be able to avoid this conflict.

Between these two extremes are states, Oregon, for example, with a nonmetropolitan flagship university and a constrained metropolitan university in their largest metropolitan area. In this case, the demands of the metropolitan area will continue to grow and put increasing pressure on the state and the constrained metropolitan university to change significantly. Some states like Illinois may encourage the transformation of their constrained metropolitan university into a comprehensive research university like the state's nonmetropolitan flagship, but do so at the risk of leaving many needs of the metropolitan area unmet. Most smaller states, unable to afford such a transformation, are likely to encourage only marginal changes or might impose multiple missions on their metropolitan institutions. In either case, the major metropolitan area of these states will continue to be underserved.

It is possible that these metropolitan areas will ultimately lower their expectations, seemingly solving the problem. Unfortunately, in doing so they may become less attractive to people and industries that in a fast-changing global economy and society have come to depend on postsecondary education more than ever before. As metropolitan areas

with strong and varied postsecondary education resources excel in the twenty-first century, those metropolitan centers without a strong commitment to postsecondary education are apt to be susceptible to economic stagnation, population decline, and lower living standards.

Alternatively, as pressures for change build, resources remain limited, and political opposition stays strong, some smaller states may look beyond traditional solutions. Some may not be willing to settle for "lower expectations" in their largest metropolitan area and the possible consequences of such a decision. They may also realize that what is needed is not another comprehensive research university or "second-class" version, but rather a new kind of institution that is capable of meeting the unique needs of a major twenty-first century American metropolis.

## *Suggested Readings*

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