Overview

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One of the exhilarating characteristics of metropolitan universities is that our missions and urban locations challenge us to acknowledge and address societal change. When local businesses tell us that we need to retrofit academic programs to educate for "real time" changes in engineering or communications, we may use this feedback to revitalize. When our older students, so many of whom work in metropolitan corporations, echo such sentiments in the classroom, we have an opportunity to strengthen our connection with the fast-changing work world by bridging with their experiences.

Similarly, when our students register complaints about university red tape, poor advising, or inflexible policies, we have "improvable moments" when a bit of active listening and a few practical adjustments may go a long way toward upgrading the quality of student life. If we choose to ignore these signs, we do so at considerable risk to long term institutional health, for it does not take long for a culture of mistrust and miscommunication to take hold in a complex organization.

We have entered an era when total quality management and continuous improvement are the operating paradigms of any organization concerned about excellence. Universities have come to realize that it is not just what we do with students, but *how* we do it (process) that makes a difference in their college experiences. Declining enrollments, poor retention, and disappointing graduation rates may reflect student dissatisfaction. Our reaction to such problems cannot be indifference. Colleges and universities all over the world are rethinking how they work with students, questioning the status quo and thinking "outside of the box."

Process reform and technological innovation have contributed to the development of imaginative approaches to attracting, enrolling, teaching, advising, tracking, and supporting college students. Universities in the forefront of these transformations are carving out enviable reputations. Those who are responsive to changing demographics and student needs are creating new niches and growing. Others are withering, trapped by old ways of thinking and doing and being. This issue describes innovations and transformations taking place in a variety of metropolitan universities.

Improvement in the way we collect and use information about students is making it possible to construct a better case for obtaining a fair share of higher education funding. Novel ways of engaging students in their academic work, both in and out of the classroom, are meeting with success. And changing conditions at home

and abroad are summoning us to reconsider the way we prepare students for work and life in a multicultural, interdependent world.

Whether attributable to their relative youth or to unfortunate misconceptions about their valuable contributions, our urban public institutions of higher learning often fare poorly in the state funding cycle. Not enough is known or understood by our boards and legislators about our students, our faculty, or our accomplishments. In the first article, MacLean describes how a group of urban universities gathers and shares comparative information about their students, enrollments, programs, and budgets in order to create a more cohesive description of the missions, goals, and resources of metropolitan universities. In so doing, this group hopes to strengthen the argument for expanding programs and fiscal resources.

Within our institutions, we have been slow to adjust to the changing times and reasonable requests of our students, choosing instead to hold on to the assumption that the terms "consumer" and "student" cannot, and dare not, be used in the same sentence. Meanwhile, urban students "vote with their feet," in many cases choosing academic institutions and programs as much for their flexibility and convenience as for their integrity or quality. Hence, we are challenged to provide both. Beeler and Moehl provide a case examination of how one urban university is attempting to redefine the culture of its student services, using continuous improvement methods to integrate student enrollment, advising, and retention systems.

In her article, Krupar outlines how we can address the unintended outcomes of campus computing, by choosing to acknowledge the differing backgrounds and experiences of our entering students. She describes the difficulties that she encountered in designing and promoting a resourceful academic course designed to assist "technophobic" or otherwise resistant students. Then, Brown describes how a student's choice of university may be affected by use of the Internet. His fanciful description of student David Forman's discovery of this dynamic medium is tempered by a few caveats and ethical considerations. He also provides examples of Internet addresses that can be useful in students' explorations of the "net."

Large and growing proportions of metropolitan students are older, working, commuting adults with families, rich life experiences, and a high level of maturity. Increasingly, they are working in team-based industries that design, manufacture, or otherwise produce wealth across time zones and geopolitical boundaries. Is there something they know that our faculty members

do not yet fully comprehend? Stutler proposes that these students hold the power to make classroom and other course experiences more vital, relevant, and dynamic. His discussion of the possibility of developing student "learner experts" to partner with instructors is original and intriguing.

In her article on study-abroad opportunities, Dotson suggests that more ingenuity is needed to expand the types of international experiences available to nontraditional students. She includes some discussion of the shortcomings and challenges of current programs, and argues (contrary to the opinion of many "purists") that there is benefit in even the most abbreviated of visits to another land or culture. Next, Ludeman describes how student service professionals, particularly senior student affairs officers, are beginning to break new ground in working for the common good of college students worldwide. He reports that his American colleagues are cultivating prosaic exchanges and partnerships through their professional associations. As a result, American students may soon enjoy the benefit of improved relations and practices.

As mobile, busy, and committed to other, nonacademic responsibilities as they are, metropolitan students are notoriously hesitant to involve themselves in many aspects of campus life. A plethora of research confirms that for such students, the college experience is less than a full one. Their full-time, residential student counterparts have more opportunities to learn from each other, engaging in study groups, volunteer organizations, student clubs, recreation, and the like. Nowhere is the downside of this cultural dynamic more evident than in the absence of a shared struggle to master concepts, foster ideals, and promote critical thinking. Hence, metropolitan universities are always on the lookout for natural ways to involve undergraduates in student-to-student experiences. Wilcox and Koehler here provide a fascinating portrait of Supplemental Instruction, a programmatic approach to improving student performance and retention in traditionally difficult courses. Based on the notion that peer-facilitated review sessions led by successful students will enhance content mastery and promote critical thinking; this very successful approach is presently in operation at several hundred colleges and universities worldwide.

It is, of course, old news that demographic shifts, interconnected economies, and instantaneous global communications have underscored the necessity for understanding and collaboration among the world's citizens. As we continue to seek non-violent solutions to hatred, bigotry, overcrowding, and hunger, we must find ways to develop students who graduate with new skills,

who know how to live and work effectively among many peoples. Our graduates must be able to recognize and respect the cultural differences in ways of conceptualizing, knowing, valuing, and cooperating. At the same time, our institutions cry out for management approaches that utilize and reward concern for the common good, collaboration, and other-centeredness. In this issue, Lawson and Tubbs discuss ways in which metropolitan universities have begun to promote such awareness, knowledge, understanding, and skill among students and other campus constituents. In their article, students Seitz and Pepitone outline a truly heartening new program for developing a different type of student and community leader—one who is motivated not by greed or power, but by magnanimity and goodwill.

Our age is marked by upheaval, dissonance, confusion, and a general summons to transformation. A meaningful college education has always been marked by these same attributes. Metropolitan universities, then, are challenged to be concomitantly responsive and proactive, charting social advancement, anticipating educational needs, and redesigning programs to be in step with the times. Our students deserve no less.