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University-based service and research centers offer important lessons for those engaged in the task of transforming academic institutions. This article reports the experiences of the Institute of Portland Metropolitan Studies at Portland State University in Portland, Oregon. The Institute was formed seven years ago in an effort to connect the resources of higher education to critical issues facing communities in a six-county metropolitan area. Eight lessons are identified based on the experience to date.

At the Edge: University-based Institutes and Their Communities

The urban university has emerged as a distinct representative of American higher education (Waetjen and Muffo, 1983). The founding or transformation of universities to serve their immediate urban environments has re-emerged to focus new attention on the role for a place in traditional teaching, research, and service components of the university.

The notion that universities should seek and maintain relationships between their main mission, teaching and research, and area communities—and that they have a responsibility to do so—is still hotly debated and far from settled (Shalala, 1991; Stukel, 1994; Greiner, 1997). Lee Benson and Ira Harkavy (1997) note that the idea of not just a role but a responsibility for universities to connect with their communities is a question that “...is particularly hard to answer at present because, among numerous other reasons, academics have ignored it so studiously.”

Barry Checkoway (1997), in a review of efforts to “reinvent” the research university to incorporate community partnerships, notes that universities with some of the greatest intellectual resources in the world are inaccessible to the communities within which they reside. He identifies the key roles that institutional culture and systems of rewards have played in defining the relationships that universities have with their communities, and in throwing up barriers to redefining those relationships either institutionally or through the often heroic efforts of individual faculty members.

Like other efforts at institutional restructuring or innovation, the full flowering of the modern urban university is a work in progress. Whether we can identify a formula for success or not remains to be seen. Nonetheless, universities are moving ahead to design and implement a wide range of university-community linkages and, in the process, are generating new insights into the extent to which universities and communities can substantively join in common purpose.

This article reports on the experience at Portland State University with the creation and first seven years of operation of the Institute of Portland Metropolitan Studies. Like most university-based research and service centers, the Institute sits far enough outside traditional disciplinary and functional attributes of the university to be regarded as a marginal activity within the university culture. However, in light of the tendency for innovation in higher education to occur at the fringe (Smith, 1993), studying the experiences associated with creating and managing these kinds of institutes and centers can provide a window into the nature of the challenge identified by Checkoway, Benson and Harkavy, and others.

The article is organized into three sections. The first describes the history, mission, organization, and activities of the Institute of Portland Metropolitan Studies. The second section reviews the lessons learned in its brief tenure. The third section concludes with some comments on the implications of these lessons for the future of the institute and similar activities associated with the emergence of Portland State University as an urban university.

The Institute of Portland Metropolitan Studies

The history and traditions of the Portland-Vancouver metropolitan area have played a central role in shaping the structure, mission, and programs of the institute. The Portland region sits at the confluence of two rivers, the Willamette and the Columbia, and straddles the Oregon-Washington boundary. It includes Portland, the largest city in Oregon, and Vancouver, soon to be the second largest city in Washington.

Portland in particular is known for the revival of its downtown, system of neighborhood associations, and presence in a region and state known for land-use planning and growth management activities. The Portland metropolitan area, once a service center for the agriculture and forest products economy of the entire Columbia River basin, is now a "silicon forest" and is the nation's 20th largest manufacturing employer.

This is a deeply intentional place. Public policy making is participatory and accessible. The region has examined and reexamined its future, and taken steps, like the creation of a regional government, unlikely to be replicated in many other places. Consequently, there are many opportunities for community involvement on the part of a university-based institute.

However, issues move quickly in this environment, requiring a high degree of flexibility and responsiveness. Equally challenging is the fact that any issue of consequence is enmeshed in a spirited and meaningful public discourse, with well-defined roles for citizens, interests, and institutions, and citizens and institutions expect involvement to lead to action and products.

The formal stirrings that led to the creation of the institute began in 1987 with a task force convened to discuss the creation of a university-based institute to extend the

resources of higher education to metropolitan area communities. The work of the task force was incorporated into the report of “The Governor’s Commission on Higher Education in the Portland Metropolitan Area” (Governor’s Commission, 1990).

Shortly after the release of the Governor’s Commission report, Portland State University developed a strategic plan to act on the urban grant university vision. Using the strategic plan as a guide, the university fashioned the “Portland Agenda,” a set of key program initiatives to be funded directly by the state, and including the first funding for the institute.

Armed with the support of the university and the Oregon University System, support for the development of the institute from surrounding counties and major cities was obtained. Early in this process, the City of Portland pledged \$100,000 to “seed” the start-up program for this new initiative. An interim director was appointed in 1991, and after a national search, the first permanent director was hired in 1992 on the recommendation of a committee composed of university and community representatives. In 1994 the institute’s board was expanded to include representation from Columbia County, added to the federal definition of the metropolitan area early that year.

Structure

Perhaps the most unique aspect of the institute is the central policy-making role vested in its 23-member community-based board, drawn from throughout the six-county region. The Dean of the College of Urban and Public Affairs serves on the board in an ex-officio role, but no university faculty, staff, or administration member has a vote. The president of the university appoints members to the board upon recommendation by the board’s nominating committee. The Director of the Institute reports to the board and to the Dean of the College of Urban and Public Affairs.

Funding

The institute has three sources of financial support. The university provides ongoing core support, consisting of salaries for the director, a secretary, and a services and supplies budget. In recent years, the university has also supplied a portion of the time of two faculty members and has assigned up to six parttime graduate research assistants to the institute each academic year.

The institute is designed to remain small. Rather than hiring a research staff, the service role envisioned for the organization includes moving research projects directly into the hands of faculty or into standing research centers both at Portland State University and elsewhere in higher education.

The second source of support has been local government. In addition to the initial contribution of \$100,000 by the City of Portland, the institute raised an additional \$75,000 from other jurisdictions and agencies to create an unrestricted seed fund for new initiatives. The third source has been contracts, grants, and sponsorships for specific projects, events, and publications. The annual budget for the institute totals approximately \$250,000, most of it coming from the university.

The earliest descriptions of the institute included the development of an endowment that, over time, could fund both core operations and provide a pool of funds for supporting research. For the first six years, the board of the institute did not pursue an

endowment. The idea of the institute was new, and raising a significant endowment for a new, emerging institution is extremely difficult, and doubly so when the territory of interest is metropolitan in scope. Being metropolitan in scope means, by definition, representing a territory that is no one's primary community or charge.

Recently, the institute's board has been revisiting long-term funding needs. Today the institute is the only civic organization in the region with a metropolitan span of interest. There is no other organization in our region committed to advancing metropolitan cohesion and sense of place. Although this fact was not the primary intent when the institute was created, it has provided the organization with a unique and important role.

The board has formed a development committee and committed itself to central fundraising activities. The board is planning to seek an endowment to develop and sustain two areas of activity. The first is the Community Research Trust, a dedicated source of funds that can be invested in the research priorities of the metropolitan community, to understand new issues, explore best practices, and learn from local and regional experiences. The second is Catalytic Leadership. The institute has played an important role as a convener and bridge builder. In the future, it will seek to become an important catalyst in bridging the divide between urban and rural/small town Oregon, and in promoting community-building among metropolitan area jurisdictions themselves.

Broker and Catalyst Roles

Today, the mission of the institute is to serve the region and further the urban mission of Portland State University by:

- providing new access to the resources of higher education for area communities;
- helping to make understanding of the metropolitan area of strategic value to citizens, faculty, students, elected officials, and civic leaders;
- providing a neutral forum for the discussion of critical metropolitan policy issues;
- creating partnerships linking faculty, students, and community groups to meet community and scholarly objectives; and
- sponsoring public service research.

The institute is primarily a service center in the university and the community. It serves both as a "new front door" for higher education and as an active participant in the civic life of the metropolitan area, and, as envisioned by the university, it serves as a broker.

But the board has envisioned the institute not simply as a broker, but as a vehicle for identifying critical metropolitan issues and as a catalyst for bringing new attention to issues of regional significance. While the university sees the institute as a vehicle for advancing its urban university mission, the board sees it as a resource for promoting appropriate action on a metropolitan scale. Though these roles are not in conflict, they do lead to a division in attention and program, with the community, as represented by the board, seeking one set of actions, and the university seeking another.

Its roles as both broker and catalyst are intentional, and help to define the role for the institute among other university-based centers for research and public service. Four primary initiatives form the core of the Institute's activities:

1. **Creating university-community partnerships.** The institute seeks to develop partnerships involving faculty, students, and community groups. In addition to formal partnerships, it provides a clearinghouse for internships, assists with linking clients to university-based service providers, and helps identify community-based clients for class and faculty projects.
2. **Promoting metropolitan collaboration.** Many if not most community issues are common to a wide range of metropolitan area communities. To promote the creation of new collaborative partnerships to address regional issues, the institute has developed several projects to help explain the common features of the metropolitan area:
 - **Metropolitan web page.** The institute's web page (<http://www.upa.pdx.edu/IMS/>) provides access to all jurisdictions and a wide range of community groups and resources in the metropolitan area.
 - ***Metroscape*.** This magazine is produced twice each year for a general audience, and it includes information about metropolitan issues, history, and innovations, along with an atlas section linked to a topic. Past atlas sections have focused on poverty and race, metropolitan area agriculture, and public education.
 - ***The Catalyst*.** This is the institute's quarterly newsletter, reporting on the actions of the board and on special projects.
 - **Annual Leadership Symposium.** The symposium is a project of the board, is supported by staff, and is an event that brings new ideas into the region, encourages leaders to meet face to face, and helps to refine the institute's projects. For the past two years, the event has featured joint presentations by Washington Governor Gary Locke and Oregon Governor John Kitzhaber on the future of the bistate metropolitan area.
 - **Metropolitan Briefing Book.** This is the institute's biennial compilation of critical metropolitan issues and emerging regional trends developed for a target audience of newly elected officials.
 - **PSU@HOME** is a van and equipment used to provide Internet and Geographic Information System access, training, and technical assistance to citizens, community groups and jurisdictions.
3. **Issue development.** From time to time the institute is contacted to help with the development of issues and projects in the metropolitan region. This is an ongoing process that may or may not yield new additions to the project categories listed above. Currently the institute has received grant funding to support its "Regional Connections" project, an investigation of the underlying sources of strength in the metropolitan area economy with special attention to the major clusters in its trade

or export sector. It also helps to convene the “Neighboring Cities Forum,” an organization drawing together small towns outside the core of the region that are coping with the growth induced by the robust metropolitan economy.

4. Administration and board development. Administrative tasks are largely managed by the director. These include oversight for day-to-day operation of the institute, service to the board, and interaction with other parts of the university and college management structure.

Lessons Learned

Over the past seven years the work of the institute has continued to evolve. For example, changes in information technology alone, from electronic bulletin boards to e-mail to the Internet, have led to the demise of early projects and the beginning of new ones. Eight lessons have emerged from these experiences:

- *We are not the first.* To better understand its own aims and experience, the institute developed a very brief survey of similar research and service institutes at other self-identified urban universities. Two consistent themes are evident. First, all of the efforts surveyed receive some form of hard core support either from their universities or, in the case of public institutions, from their legislature. Second, most institutes and centers, although dedicated to university-community partnerships, are governed by either the faculty involved or by the faculty in consultation with department heads and deans. Some of these efforts incorporate community advisory boards, but the survey discovered none like the institute, where policy direction is explicitly delegated to a community-based board.
- *Is it a broker or is it a catalyst?* In general, we’ve found that playing the role of both broker and catalyst entails an extra degree of complexity. The steady stream of inquiries coming in over the telephone and now e-mail alone could keep the institute busy. The catalyst role is more intentional and competes for time and resources. Balancing the two is an ongoing task and blurs the line between the institute as an intermediary in the university on one hand, and on the other, as an organization with its own research and civic agenda.
- *Partnerships take time.* Setting up a one-term partnership takes as much time as one that might last for five years. Consequently, staff looks for opportunities to establish three to five-year partnerships, and utilizes an explicit memorandum of understanding that spells out the roles for faculty, the institute, and community partners throughout the life of the agreement.
- *Faculty are not the same as staff.* In general, faculty make somewhat ambivalent consultants. Good customer service is not an explicit criterion for attaining either tenure or promotion. Thus faculty should be sought for consultant roles only when roles and expectations have been clearly spelled out and agreed to. Unless it is clear that the work they’re doing will “count” towards promotion and ten-

ure, the institute will not have the ability to direct their time to the more mundane, but no less crucial, aspects of either the broker or catalyst roles.

In the university, even funded projects won't attract principal investigators if they can't meet the needs that key faculty have for scholarly recognition by their departments and disciplines. That this is an issue requiring special and sustained attention can be found in the recent two-issue series on faculty rewards and the definition of scholarship in *Metropolitan Universities* (Caret and McMahon, 1997). Although Portland State has been aggressively pursuing a (re)definition of scholarship consistent with its urban university mission, that process is ongoing and will take time to have an effect (Johnson and Wamsler, 1997). Further, whether it can assist faculty with their relationships with their discipline remains to be seen. In the meantime, the institute has taken a pragmatic approach, developing partnerships linked to methods classes or other studio courses where engagement can occur as part of the curriculum.

We've learned that intellectual freedom, like power, consists primarily in having control over the formulation of the questions, rather than merely providing the answers. Faculty get recognized by their disciplines for the clear role that they play in asking the questions. If the "researchable question" is formulated in a manner that cannot be explicitly traced back to the creative contributions of an individual faculty member, then it has diminished value for that faculty member within the institution and their discipline.

Since by definition partnerships involve sharing power, and therefore control over the objectives, existing reward structures and even the concept of intellectual freedom, as formulated here, work against faculty participation in cooperative ventures. Reward structures are particularly harsh for the involvement of junior faculty, despite the fact that they are often the most open to engaging the community in their work.

- *People love to learn about their metropolitan areas.* The activities that have been most positively received are those that provide new information about the nature and dynamics of the metropolitan area. The institute's publications, particularly the magazine *Metroscape*, are cited in surveys conducted by the institute as products of particular value to institute stakeholders. When asked to evaluate events sponsored by the institute, participants give high marks to opportunities to connect with people and communities they do not know well.

When polled, members of the institute's board report that one of the great satisfactions of serving is the opportunity to learn about the region and to meet leaders from other communities. University institutes and centers can both assemble new information and bring it to the public in ways that help to build a positive regional sense of place, and in our experience there is interest in and support for these activities.

- *The regional view needs to be complemented by local involvement.* During the past six years, the work of the institute has evolved with a focus on two geographies, the region and the community. Our presence as the only civic organization with a metropolitan span of inter-

est in the region is a testament to the ambiguous role that the region plays as the geographic unit for community for most people. In addition, the web of political, market, community, and social boundaries, coupled with the physical landscape itself, can all work against attaining a metropolitan view.

In the course of doing our work at the regional scale, we have also learned that the institute has to be present at the very local level. There are tremendous things happening at the block and neighborhood level in this region. This most local definition of community is, in fact, where solutions to community problems are found on a daily basis. These two scales then, metropolitan and local, have emerged in the institute's work as the geographies that matter, and where both the institute and the university can and should make a difference.

This has led to an interesting phenomenon. Often staff are asked simply to be present as neutral observers to aid with smoothing the process, or to provide feedback. However, this role as a "presence" is extremely difficult to fund, and is more like technical assistance than research or direct service. Consequently, core support is essential to enable the institute to serve the community across a full spectrum of engagements.

- *The institute is shaped by its director.* Despite the role for the board as policymaker, the director puts a personal stamp on both the operation and products of the institute. Again, in light of the reward system operating within the university, this is to be expected. However, it bears keeping in mind that the long-term interests of an organization such as the institute lie in its ability to be known for its mission, rather than for its last project. If the definition of the mission or character and day-to-day priorities of the institute change with each director, then we may be sacrificing more than we know.
- *Board development must be a priority.* Finally, board development is an ongoing task. The institute is different from a nonprofit organization. It is lodged within the university, a large organization that is publicly funded, and it identifies with a territory that has no natural constituency. Therefore, service on the board of the institute is a task different from most that experienced civic actors may have encountered.

The Future

Throughout its tenure, the institute has experienced a tremendous amount of change within the university itself. When the institute was created, Portland State was without a reformulated undergraduate curriculum, had no School of Government, did not require a community-based "capstone" experience for all undergraduates, did not have the revised promotion and tenure guidelines that created a path to recognize the "scholarship of community service," and did not have a center on campus to support the creation of curriculum-based university-community partnerships through training, technical assistance, and cash awards.

Today, Portland State has all of these things. In some cases, this has allowed the institute to refocus and retool its broker role. In others, it has allowed it to favor its

catalyst role over its broker role. In any case, the university is changing, and the institute must change with it. While the institute will continue to serve both the university and the community, the nature of that service will remain a work in progress.

Finally, the ultimate challenge for this institute and this university is to join the challenge facing the entire region: to be an exemplary place to live, do business, grow up, and grow old in. As an urban university, our objective is, in part, to contribute to making this region a place that works environmentally, politically, socially, creatively, and economically. When the region is visited for those reasons, visitors should find the fingerprints of the university and its many partners on the successes that have drawn recognition. Then, and only then, will the promise of the urban university be realized.

Suggested Readings

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