

# **Overview of the 2007 Conference of the Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities: “Metropolitan Universities and Community Engagement”**

By Robert L. Caret

Towson University was honored to host the 13th Annual Conference of the Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities in Baltimore’s Inner Harbor in October 2007. More than three hundred faculty, staff, and senior level administrators representing approximately eighty institutions, national and international, came together for three days to discuss the latest research relevant to community engagement practices in today’s urban and metropolitan universities. Our discussions explored potential solutions to the challenges our universities face while also raising important questions and issues that motivate our institutions to continue their work in our urban and metropolitan environments.

The conference received immense support from our corporate sponsors. The title sponsor was Capstone Development Corporation, a leader in on-campus student housing nationwide. The platinum sponsor, Whiting Turner Contracting provides construction management, general contracting and design/build services on projects small and large for a diverse group of higher education customers. The two gold sponsors were Chartwells and Geico, both service providers for higher education. Additionally, we had seven bronze sponsors, two media sponsors, Dell as the Cyber Café sponsor, and a registration table sponsor. We could not have had such a successful conference without their generosity!

The Conference featured five keynote presentations and approximately eighty refereed concurrent presentations. Additionally, for the first time, this year we included poster presentations in our program. These presentations addressed numerous topics under the theme of *Metropolitan Universities and Community Engagement*. They were categorized within four presentation tracks including: strategic planning and institutional engagement; community partnerships; K-16 partnerships; and service-learning, civic engagement, and student programming.

The keynote presentations provided diverse perspectives from the growth in for-profit enterprises to the role of universities in economic development. The keynote

presentations included:

- Dr. Lee S. Shulman, *President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching*, discussed engaging pedagogies and the need to make a more integrated and pervasive commitment to engaging our students throughout the curriculum. The text of his speech is included in this conference issue of the journal.
- Ms. Diane Auer Jones, *Assistant Secretary for Post-Secondary Education for the U.S. Department of Education*, focused on the importance of the urban university as a broker of opportunity in the community.
- Mr. R. Christopher Hoehn-Saric, *Senior Managing Director for Sterling Capital Partners*, outlined the role of for-profit enterprises in the global market.
- Dr. James L. Fisher, *Consultant/Author and President Emeritus of CASE and Towson University*, discussed the role of the urban and metropolitan presidency.
- Panel Discussion on the impact of higher education on the economy, moderated by Bowie State University President, Dr. Mickey Burnim. Panelists included:
  - Mr. M.J. Brodie, *President of the Baltimore Development Corporation*
  - Mr. David Edgerley, *Secretary of Maryland's Department of Business and Economic Development*
  - Mr. Donald C. Fry, *President of the Greater Baltimore Committee*

As CUMU President, I had the opportunity to outline many of the great accomplishments the Coalition had made over the past year during the annual Presidential Address. My discussion focused specifically on our increased number of partnerships with higher education associations and institutions and telling our message, both vital strategies to our association's ongoing growth. This year we partnered with the American Association of State Colleges and Universities on their Millennium Leadership Institute. This initiative prepares persons who are traditionally underrepresented in the roles of president or chancellor in our nation's colleges and universities. Additionally, we continued our partnership with the American Council on Education CUMU-ACE Fellows Program designed to widen the pipeline of Fellows who choose to do their fellowship in a university that is defined as urban and metropolitan. This year CUMU partnered with *The New York Times* on the Knowledge Network initiative. This innovative program will transform online and classroom instruction by enhancing the courses with *The New York Times* online resources. Additionally, the Coalition sponsored and advised the development of The Engagement Leadership Academy at Virginia Tech. This executive leadership experience, which will be offered for the first time in June 2008, is designed to develop the skills of administrators who are responsible for building institutional capacity for engagement.

Over the next year, the Coalition will focus on growing our membership, being advocates for our unique institutions regionally and nationally, and engaging provosts and other campus leaders in our organization to help lead CUMU in the future years.

Two special events showcased Baltimore and the surrounding metropolitan centers. On Saturday evening, the tour and Welcome Reception hosted at the world famous National Aquarium in Baltimore highlighted not only the unique exhibits, but also

Baltimore's growing metropolis. On Sunday evening, the Towson University campus played host to the President's Dinner which featured "Tastes of Maryland," including state specialties like crab cakes and rockfish. The evening also included a rich variety of dance performances examining such social issues as HIV/AIDS, the Baby Boomer Generation, and a modern dance with African cultural and historical perspectives.

## **Key Conference Papers**

The urban and metropolitan university role is greatly focused on engagement that contributes to regional workforce and economic development. We pride ourselves on our partnerships and service to communities. This year's theme provided participants a platform to discuss best practices and provocative issues related to community engagement. The conference dialogue explored a number of key issues. How should the institutional vision incorporate and work with the environment in which it serves – safety, economic, and educational aspects included? How do we deepen the impact of engagement on student learning and on communities? How is academic culture changing to support engagement? These areas of interest and how they relate to the growth of not only the institution but also the metropolitan surroundings are vital to the success of these partnerships.

In the paper, "Research Students and Community Development: The Challenges of Integrating Academic Expectations with Community Needs and Values," Michael Darcy and colleagues, representing the University of Western Sydney, introduce the inherent need for the metropolitan institution to play a role in the development of the surrounding community. However, Darcy discusses that because of the structure and size of the university, it is inadvertently constructed to undermine meaningful community engagement. The paper states, "...universities' institutionalized research training and management practices contradict the basic principles of community development and make meaningful engagement extremely difficult." Darcy asserts that one of the essential ways to overcome this barrier is the utilization of the Mode 2 method of research that he links to the growth of Academic Service Learning, a pedagogy which promotes the richness of the learning experience for students in the community. Darcy notes that difficulties in the development of genuine engagement and community partnerships are based on conflicts between the organizational structure of our institutions, the originality of the engagement project and ethical practice and intellectual practices.

Engagement within the community can take many forms. For researchers at Indiana State University, their research was a two-pronged examination of the educational effect on students, but further, on the positive effects of the students' work within the community. Greg Bierly and Nancy Rogers' paper, "Civic Engagement at the Intersection of Pedagogy and Community" discusses the effects of these practices of the Terre Haute community surrounding Indiana State University. These programs fall under the Indiana State University Liberal Learning in Action (LLA) program, a series of engagement classes for which professors submit community outreach programs for funding. In a four-year period, 2,350 students enrolled in the LLA programs, with 79

percent of those students stating that they would utilize the knowledge they gained outside the classroom in future classes. In conclusion, Bierly and Rogers found that the key educational gains within the student population were their increased social awareness and their improved communication skills.

Our urban and metropolitan universities continue to grow and evolve, some in student enrollment, but others in the physical size of the institution. The University of Baltimore's Provost, Dr. Wim Wiewel and graduate student Kara Kunst saw a need for institutions to view what comparable data institutions across the nation were using to plan their developments or expansion. In this paper, "University Real Estate Development Database: A Database-Driven Internet Research Tool," Wiewel states "the purpose of this research is to create a comprehensive survey of real estate development to make broad, general statements regarding the impact of University Real Estate Development on the local and regional social, political, and economic landscape...." The research database tool has found projects representing over one thousand institutions and projects ranging in size from three thousand to 1.2 million square feet and prices from \$300,000 to \$330,000,000. Additionally, the URED database breaks down projects by their uses from academic structures to athletic and residential, among other types of development. Wiewel describes the importance of this database for institutions of higher education: it provides one source to see the importance of stakeholders, collaborators, and the commitment of the institution to grow beyond the usual campus boundaries.

Researchers at the University of Nebraska at Omaha recognized a need for additional research on young African Americans' work within the community. Barbara Hewins-Maroney's paper, "Civic Engagement and Black College Students: A Pilot Study," poses questions about how involved young Black men and women are within the community and how their attitudes toward community and civic engagement as youth are becoming more scrutinized within the metropolitan community. Her findings illustrated they are very involved in the community. Nearly 55 percent of the students questioned in the pilot survey said they had helped within the community to resolve an issue as well as participated in a religious function. Her research also found that an overwhelming number of the students felt that they could not access their community leaders. Her research concludes with the assertion that the community leadership must improve and re-evaluate its engagement with Black youth who feel they only have access to their university administrators.

Every institution is built by its faculty members and their ability to stay engaged and committed to student development. In the paper "Staying Alive," Amy Strage and colleagues discuss the need for mid-career faculty to revitalize their approaches in what she describes as "renewal of spirit." These are faculty members with twenty years of service to scholarly education that are "stagnant" or "stuck." The most important concern raised by these mid-career faculty members is a lack of relevance in the fields in which they serve as "...their training and areas of expertise become obsolete." The paper asked what tasks and projects can faculty within the metropolitan universities take on to revitalize their sense of relevance. Findings suggest strategies for promoting

faculty growth and development beyond a “fixed mindset,” and ideas for how administrators can promote faculty renewal.

Metropolitan universities pride themselves on their work within the community. The importance of partnerships with external organizations within the surrounding cities is crucial to an institution’s relevance. In Armand Carriere’s paper “Community Engagement Through Partnerships—A Primer,” there is a discussion of the “...basic tenets of community engagement...” Carriere discusses the importance of the university president in needing to be a “champion” in community engagement. His/her efforts will contribute to the development of a relevant institutional mission while working with the community to mesh as one. However, the work of the faculty is also crucial as they need to think and teach beyond the classroom walls as students gain real service-learning training. Finally, Carriere discusses the importance of the university being “accessible” to the community. Establishing a framework such as this will ripen the ability for the institution to engage with the community and partner with organizations to better the relationship between the institution and the constituency which it serves.

The School of Social Work at University of South Florida began the Prodigy Program five years ago in a partnership which has grown to fifteen community agencies. In Jerry Miller and colleagues’ paper, “Connecting Art with Science and the University with the Community,” researchers discuss the mission to partner with organizations involved in the rehabilitation of juvenile delinquents. Serving ten thousand people within the University of South Florida community, Prodigy employs artists to teach classes to delinquents over an eight-week period. The program served over three thousand youths ages seven to seventeen in 2006-2007 who partook in these classes for twenty-four hours or more during the eight-week period. The results exceeded the contractual funding goals. In 2004-2005 the rate of non-recidivism was 88 percent while 90 percent completed the course. Additionally, the project researchers provided impact studies that illustrate the importance of diversion programs within the lowest income communities where this program is located. The program’s success is based on the partnerships’ ability to allow experts to implement the programs for which they are best suited, i.e. the university trained the artists about how to teach a class of students while the partnering agencies executed the actual programs.

In Paul Gaston’s paper, “A Fine Balance: Community Engagement and the Poise of a Metropolitan University,” he proposes four keys to effective community engagement within the context of a metropolitan institution’s efforts to relate with, identify and work to resolve problems within the community. Additionally, he asserts the importance of one of the primary missions of our institutions—to provide students a high-quality learning experience outside the classroom through service learning and community engagement projects. Gaston says, “Those that most fully fulfill the public promise will be alert to emerging needs and opportunities, sufficiently agile to respond to them expeditiously, attentive to the ratio of costs and benefits, and able to adapt to changing circumstances.”

## **Conclusion**

As stated in the Declaration of Metropolitan Universities, “We commit our institutions to be responsive to the needs of our communities by seeking new ways of using resources to provide leadership in addressing metropolitan problems through teaching, research, and service.” The 2007 conference attracted more than three hundred higher education leaders and community engagement experts, all of whom provided valuable and exciting ideas on the growing necessity of university-community engagement and partnerships. Please plan to attend next year for the 14th Annual CUMU Conference: *The Metropolitan University of the 21st Century: Building Bridges to Regional Stewardship*, October 18-21, 2008 co-hosted by Northern Kentucky University and the University of Cincinnati.

## **Author Information**

Robert L. Caret became Towson University’s twelfth president in 2003. Dr. Caret served as a faculty member, dean, executive vice president and provost of Towson University for twenty-one years before leaving to assume the presidency of San Jose State University in 1995. Returning to Maryland and his Towson University roots, President Caret re-established connections and created new partnerships with regional business, nonprofit and civic organizations. Caret’s vision of Towson University as Maryland’s metropolitan university was instrumental in relocating the national headquarters of the Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities (CUMU) to Towson’s campus. He is the current President of CUMU.

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