

## Equity and the Urban University: Introduction to the Chicago Conference Issue

Beatriz Gonzalez and Howard Rosing

This 2018 CUMU Annual Conference issue of *Metropolitan Universities* journal (MUJ) highlights efforts by universities and scholars seeking to engage directly with issues of equity in cities. Reflecting on the conference theme, Partnering for Equity, the City of Chicago offered arguably one of the most sobering and rich contexts for discussing the role of higher education in promoting equity. A 2017 study found the cost of lost income to Chicago's regional economy due to racial segregation exceeded \$4 billion (Urban Institute, 2017, pg. IX). This same study noted an estimated 83,000 college degrees never attained because of racial segregation (Urban Institute, 2017, pg. 40). Chicago, like many urban areas, presents the most pressing opportunities and challenges for uncovering and addressing issues of equity.

As reflected in the conference presentations and speeches, one of the most important changes in higher education is the growing recognition that social change begins on and around the campus. Paulo Freire posited this view nearly 40 years ago in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, naming education a political act. To fully realize this transformative power of higher education, universities must partner across institutions and sectors to reveal and address critical issues of equity. This is the focus of the work shared at the 2018 CUMU Annual Conference.

### In this Issue

The articles in this 2018 CUMU Annual Conference edition of *Metropolitan Universities* journal epitomize the work of metropolitan and urban colleges and universities in cooperating with communities to address mutual challenges and goals towards social justice. Lipman's conference keynote address sets the stage for this edition by provoking frank reflection on how higher education institutions can contribute to the development of educational policy that dismantles gross inequities based on race and class.

*Tackling Grand Challenges: Community Engagement and Collective Impact in Public Problem-Solving* reviews approaches to university-led grand challenge initiatives. Such initiatives have grown in presence in recent years, particularly because of the Obama Administration 2012 call to engage private and public sectors, including higher education, in joint national and global problem solving. *Tackling Grand Challenges* points to an approach that incorporates principles developed both within and outside the Academy: community-engaged scholarship, which brings meaning and relevance to learning and collective impact, and attends to essential structural issues relevant in the community. By bridging these worlds, the authors posit that grand challenge initiatives are more likely to be mutually beneficial, attuned to complexity, and thus more effective. The authors describe the example of the University of Denver, as an institution, which has used the frameworks in the implementation and organization of its interdisciplinary, publicly engaged work.

With a focused look at one partnership between a civic organization and a public university, *Alignment through Community: The Case of a Metropolitan University and the Greater Oklahoma City Hispanic Chamber of Commerce* reveals how goal alignment between partners

can spur greater effectiveness for both entities. This case example, based on the work of the University of Central Oklahoma (UCO) and the local Hispanic Chamber of Commerce (HC), demonstrates that such alignment can lead to extramural funding, transformative learning practices, and professional growth, strengthening workforce and city development. The alignment begins with the explicit match of UCO's academic mission as a metropolitan university with the HC's purpose. The joint clarity on their shared goals strongly anchored the partnership for both parties with the necessary engagement of senior leadership, the investment of resources, and even organizational restructuring for cross-entity effectiveness. While describing what is clearly a substantive endeavor, *Alignment through Community* demonstrates the deep return on investment that such efforts have.

In examining the mutually beneficial, reciprocal relationship between a university and civic leaders, *Civic Leadership Education at the University of Chicago* reinforces the efficacy of asset-based approaches to community development. *Civic Leadership* describes not only the transformation of the University's understanding of civic education, but also of its sense of responsibility for fostering it in the city of Chicago. The mutual respect across partners as co-creators of knowledge evident in the program led to a more rigorous and authentic curriculum more likely to lead to necessary change in Chicago. This article explores the University's investment in civic studies, the concept of civic leadership from the practitioner perspective, and questions of equity and inclusion, involving all in the civic-leadership development program.

While civic education and leadership development provide an important on-campus tool for engaging students in community development, college access is and will remain a critical component of creating equity and inclusion in cities. In *Achieving College Readiness through a Dual Enrollment Course: "Strategies for Success,"* Cram and Béjar outline an approach for universities to collaborate with the k-12 system and to work intentionally with students to attain the skills needed to be successful at the university. Florida International University (FIU) employed a dual enrollment course, *Strategies for Success*, evaluating and adjusting it over multiple years to determine its progress and impact. Through mentoring and coaching interventions, the course and program show promise toward providing the support and the needed academic and contextual foundation for low-income and underrepresented students to succeed in college.

Urban universities can also be an important resource for increasing equity in access to health knowledge. In their article, *Urban Partnerships to Address Health Literacy in High Need Populations*, Keller et al. describe how Marquette University collaborated with local nonprofits to implement and evaluate an evidence-supported health literacy program for low-income African American residents of Milwaukee. The project illustrates the role universities can play in illuminating the importance of health literacy training to improve the health and wellbeing of historically marginalized populations. The project provides evidence of a successful collaboration between a university and community-based organizations that can contribute to improving equity in health outcomes by local populations impacted by structural racism.

In *Community Engagement vs. Racial Equity: Can Community Engagement Work be Racially Equitable?* Telles offers a striking picture of the lack of attention to racial equity within community engagement in higher education. She argues that for institutions to be truly transformative in their urban settings, they should explicitly incorporate racial equity as a

component within engagement initiatives. Furthermore, the gap in literature in relation to racial equity in higher education community engagement provides an opportunity for scholars to engage in empirical research regarding racial equity in relation to organizational structures, staffing and programs. Echoing sentiments from Pauline Lipman's conference keynote, Telles concludes, "failing to address issues of racial equity within higher education community engagement initiatives may facilitate transforming into engaged institutions that continue to operate as racially exclusionary spaces."

We close this issue with reflections by Emily Janke, the inaugural recipient of the Barbara A. Holland Scholar-Administrator Award. In *Scholar-Administrators as Change Agents*, Janke explores the definition of scholar-administrator and how it looks in practice. She argues that through the integration of scholarship with administration, one can both ask and answer critical questions facing our institutions and communities. This in turn enhances our understanding of how to change institutional practices to fully realize the transformative power of higher education for our students and their families and our communities. Because of this, Janke calls the field to "better recognize, prepare and support scholar-administrators so that they can do what they do so well: serve as key change agents in and of higher education, and to lead boldly into a yet-to-be defined future."

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