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Metropolitan Universities

Models for the Twenty-First Century

Some universities today are presented with an unusual opportunity to evolve toward a model that addresses the contemporary challenges our nation faces, while at the same time seeking prestige and eminence. With eighty percent of the population of our nation living in metropolitan centers, opportunity occurs primarily for those institutions serving these areas. These metropolitan universities will be defined not so much by common characteristics as by the interactive philosophy from which these institutions establish significant, symbiotic relationships with their metropolitan areas. The metropolitan university concept is an inclusive and enabling model that may be adapted for institutions located in the central city, on the periphery of metropolitan areas, and within more broadly distributed population centers. Metropolitan universities will transform and be transformed by the society of which they are a part.

Our society increasingly expects public universities to address relevant contemporary problems: economic competitiveness, improved public education, and governmental leadership and efficiency. As a result, many universities, particularly those located in metropolitan areas where the problems are most severe, are responding with increased emphasis on career-oriented education, collaboration with industries and public education, and research that contributes to the well-being of the city, state, and country.

It is true that the university is and must remain an independent institution within the society of which it is a part. The responsibility of the university in the sharing, pursuit, and application of knowledge ensures that our basic culture and heritage will be preserved. The university must guard its existence as an independent institution in order to achieve these primary functions. However, the university must not stand apart from its society and its immediate environment but must be an integral part of that society. The university best serves itself and society by assuming an active leadership role, as opposed to its traditional stance of somewhat passive responsiveness.

In his insightful book *Academic Strategy*, George Keller writes: "For decades, most colleges and universities have been inner-directed, formulating their aims on the bedrock of their own religious commitments, tradition, faculty desires, and ambitions for growth, largely ignoring the world outside. . . . Colleges are switching from a self-assertion model of their existence to a biological mode of continuous adaptation to

their powerful changing social environment." (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983, p. 3) The tension between the traditional view held by academics and the expectations of society for its universities can be either a creative or a counter-productive force for the continued evolution of the university, depending on how the academy responds.

It is a myth, sometimes promulgated by the academy, that universities are cloistered halls of reflection and learning, apart and immune from society. Our origins are embedded primarily in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, when the first universities, located primarily in the great cities of Europe, came into being. These early universities were formed to train students in the professions of law, theology, and medicine, as well as to study the rediscovered works of the Greek and Arabic scholars. These institutions, from Salerno in the ninth century to Paris in the twelfth century, were thus highly specialized and responsive to societal needs.

It was in the United States in relatively modern times that the liberal arts college first appeared extensively as a separate institution apart from other professional elements traditionally associated with universities. The origins of many of our most prestigious institutions known today for their commitment to the liberal arts were related primarily to professional training.

Probably the most widely known American contribution to the evolution of universities occurred with passage of the Morrill Act of 1862, when the federal government extended its financial support to stimulate the creation of our land-grant institutions. The new public universities were specifically charged to help solve the new nation's economic problems through emphasis on agricultural and engineering teaching and research. Subsequent extensions of federal policy, particularly the Hatch Act of 1887, from which came our agricultural experiment stations, made the "practical" relationship of land-grant institutions to contemporary society even more explicit.

However, the greatest contribution of this nation to the evolution of higher education is its concept that all citizens have the right to access—an idea initiated boldly in the Northwest Ordinance of 1787. The evolution of this concept has produced an open-door policy for essentially all high school graduates and created new institutions and branches located in major metropolitan areas to serve place-bound populations. The placement of universities in population centers to ensure access to higher education for all citizens represents a major commitment unique to our country.

After World War II, the evolutionary forces born of this concept accelerated as veterans, carrying with them federal educational

benefits, flocked to universities to ensure their economic future. Thus began a period of rapid growth in the number and size of higher education institutions, that escalated during the sixties when we added a commitment to educate previously underserved student populations. The new students, representing a broader cross section of our society, were agents of transformation for our campuses. From increased numbers of different kinds of students and significant federal support of research initiated during World War II, the current multiversity was born.

Throughout the postwar period, or at least through the 1960s, states sought to meet the demand for access to higher education by creating new types of institutions to serve major population centers. During the twenty-year period from 1955 to 1975, they created 573 community colleges. At the same time, states built new or absorbed existing four-year institutions into complex state systems. Whereas states had traditionally built colleges as residential entities away from major population centers, states now sought to create universities to serve a nonresidential, place-bound student. This movement peaked in the sixties. A cursory examination of the 1988 *Higher Education Directory* indicates that at least four dozen new institutions offering four-year baccalaureate programs were established in population centers in that decade. These institutions, along with others formerly private or municipal, have become a significant but not fully recognized force in higher education.

Four different types of universities serve our population centers today:

1. Institutions born as a part of a central city prior to World War II (e.g., the University of Cincinnati and the University of California, Los Angeles).
2. Institutions created as wholly independent universities after World War II for the specific purpose of serving the needs of a population center (e.g., George Mason University and Wright State University).
3. Institutions established as branches of major university systems in order to serve metropolitan populations (e.g., the University of Illinois at Chicago, the University of New Orleans, and the University of Missouri at Saint Louis).
4. Institutions originally created for a more specialized purpose, frequently as normal schools, today have an expanded mission in serving a population center (e.g., the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, Towson State University, and Southwest Missouri State University).

Universities located in the population centers of our country now have a privileged role to play as we approach and move into the

twenty-first century. To comprehend the significance of these institutions in the future, we must understand their immediate surroundings and the symbiotic relationship between these universities and their environment.

The concentration of our population into major centers has continued unabated and will not be reversed. The 1990 census will likely describe the following situation:

- The nation's metropolitan populations exceed 200 million, with approximately 80 percent of all Americans living in the metropolitan areas.
- The most rapid growth in the metropolitan areas is in peripheral areas and in the beltways connecting our cities.
- The greatest challenges faced by the nation occur in the metropolitan setting.

Thus, as we approach the twenty-first century, metropolitan areas have become our greatest resource and our greatest challenge. For those institutions located in this environment, the opportunities and expectations will be formidable.

Andrew Young, mayor of Atlanta, has spoken for leaders in every state and city:

at the local level, there's a crying out in urban America for people to do for urban America what state universities did in the last century for rural America. We have the most productive agricultural system in the history of the world. It did not come about by accident. It came about through land-grant colleges. It came about through state farm programs. It came about as a result of the integration of the university system with the agricultural community. The benefits that accrued from that relationship fed not only America but the entire world.

A similar kind of relationship between universities and the cities is necessary. ("Public Expectations of Higher Education Beyond 1984," *American Association of State Colleges and Universities Studies*, 2:3-11)

We believe that those universities best suited to respond to this need, universities we classify as metropolitan universities, will emerge as very significant institutions in the twenty-first century.

A metropolitan university is defined first and foremost by its philosophy. It accepts its relationship to the surrounding metropolitan region as its essential rationale, its reason for being. A metropolitan university is not defined solely by its location, its student population, or any other characteristic. A university may be located within the metropolitan area, even in the central city, and yet not be *of* that city. A university may even draw an appreciable

enrollment of students from its metropolitan area and yet not be philosophically a part of that city.

Although metropolitan universities are likely to share certain characteristics, such as a high enrollment of commuter and minority students, metropolitan universities are best recognized by an interactive philosophy by which these institutions establish symbiotic relationships with their metropolitan areas. In some institutions, such interaction is focused primarily in a few well-defined units, such as a college of education or a center for urban studies; however, we envision a metropolitan university as an institution where the commitment to interaction with the metropolitan area permeates the entire institution. At such universities, applying resources to improve the metropolitan quality of life must be an institution-wide commitment.

The distinguishing element of a metropolitan university is its philosophy, not its characteristics.

The phrase or descriptor used to identify a model of a university is much less important than its operational mission statement and philosophy. At Wright State University, we have chosen the descriptor "metropolitan university" for a multitude of reasons, not the least of which is to use a term that is broadly inclusive of many institutions located in or near population centers. The term urban, not used much until the nineteenth century to describe population centers, refers in the minds of many of our constituents only to the core or central city. For too many, the term "urban university" refers only to a set of shared *characteristics*. The metropolitan university must address the challenges presented by the inner city as one facet of its overall responsibility, but those challenges do not exist in isolation from those of the whole metropolitan area, nor can they be addressed successfully in isolation. The important element that distinguishes a metropolitan university is its philosophy, not characteristics such as size, student profile, and program mix.

Recent metropolitan growth is far different from the classic urban development that characterized the earlier part of this century. Where once urbanization began with a highly centralized core and spread outward in a concentric circle, the emergence of our system of transportation has given rise to the rapid development of highly localized nodes of industrial and commercial activity, related to and dependent on the whole of the metropolitan area. Rapid development now occurs in villages and towns peripheral to the core area and along the major arteries connecting them. Ironically, the construction of interstate bypass highways, originally

intended to allow traffic to flow around major urban concentrations, has given rise in many instances to substantial commercial and industrial development away from the core city. In addition, the interstate highway system has promoted intracity growth, causing the rapid coalescing of two or more substantial population centers into a metroplex, such as Dallas-Fort Worth. Regional planners forecast a similar megalopolis in Ohio stretching from Cincinnati on the south through Dayton to Springfield and east to Columbus. Similar "metropolitan strips" are developing elsewhere. Within this environment, many states have located major educational facilities near the core city, e.g., Cleveland State University. However, those institutions created in more recent years are more likely to be placed on the periphery of the metropolitan area, such as the University of Texas at San Antonio. Only by addressing the manifold needs of the extended metropolitan area can UT-SA and similar institutions truly serve the needs of their inner city. Quite frequently, the new institutions themselves stimulate yet another center of commercial and industrial development. It is to this environment, a complex governmental and cultural environment, that the metropolitan university, be it in the core city or on the periphery, must seek to relate. George Mason University is an outstanding example of an institution that understands the necessity and the wisdom of addressing the needs of the multitude of population centers that are occurring in the complex metropolitan area in northern Virginia around Washington, D.C.

Frank Newman, in *Choosing Quality*, identifies the establishment of an appropriate niche as a prerequisite to achieving institutional excellence. One's niche depends on many factors, including the rationale for founding the university, the university's location, and its response to changes in society and the development of knowledge. Metropolitan universities should seek to develop an identity that recognizes not only the academic and scholarly values common to all universities, but also the empowering concept of a strongly interactive relationship with the metropolitan area around it. The metropolitan university shares the same commitment to the discovery, transmittal, and application of knowledge as do the institutions that represent the older land-grant and liberal arts institutions. Ultimately, the success of a metropolitan university will depend on its response to both the historical values that define a university and its interactive relationship to its metropolitan area. One does not preclude the other; in striving toward one, we naturally achieve the other.

The vision of becoming an eminent metropolitan university is an enabling one. By choosing to fit into the metropolitan university

model, a university accepts the added obligation to extend its resources to the surrounding region, to provide leadership in addressing regional needs, and to work cooperatively with the region's schools, municipalities, businesses, industries, and the many other institutions and organizations in the public and private sectors. By accepting this mission, a university affirms that it not only accepts the academic and scholarly obligations and responsibilities incumbent upon all excellent universities but that it intends to extend the expertise and energies of the university to the metropolitan region in somewhat the same way that land-grant institutions served the agricultural society during the nineteenth century.

While it is useful to draw an analogy to the land-grant university, we must take care not to extend the analogy too far in speaking of metropolitan universities. The mission of the land-grant institution was narrowly focused compared to the mission that metropolitan universities seek to address. In establishing interactions with the metropolitan environment, we must think creatively of how we might utilize the entire body of the university as an urban-based experiment station. The challenge for the metropolitan university is to transform itself by empowering the entire campus to utilize the metropolitan area as a living laboratory. As the metropolitan university concept evolves, we will see many variations in the model emerge. There can be no single interpretation of the model for a metropolitan university.

The time has come to advance the metropolitan model among a national constituency to create a defined peer group of metropolitan universities, among which program excellence can be measured and by which external evaluators, federal funding agencies included, can appropriately judge the institutions. In the process, we may arrive at definitions of excellence that will shape new priorities and directions for higher education in America.

Ernest Lynton and Sandra Elman have written: "The existing, narrowly defined mold into which almost all universities have tried to cast themselves is not adequate to the expanding needs of our contemporary, knowledge-based society. A large number of institutions are failing to realize their full potential because their internal system of values, priorities, and aspirations primarily emphasizes and rewards traditional modes of teaching for which the clientele is shrinking and basic research for which most of these institutions cannot receive adequate support. This has resulted in a real crises of purpose. By believing themselves to be what they are not, these institutions fall short of what they could be. This . . . deprives society of the substantial intellectual services that these universities could

provide." (*New Priorities for the University*, San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 1987, pp. 12-13)

Acceptance of a new model in higher education will not be easily or quickly achieved. Too many people recognize as worthy only the traditional higher education models that were part of their own educational development. This attitude characterizes both faculty—mostly educated at comprehensive research institutions—and citizens in the community itself, few of whom attended metropolitan universities and many of whom view regional and commuter emphasis as trivial. As

The metropolitan concept provides a worthy vision for institutions seeking institutional pride and success.

a result, a primary task in establishing a new model is educating the university community. Endorsement of the model and commitment to the philosophy within the institution enhances the success of acceptance in the broader society, and performance—success in useful institutional interaction with the community—will gradually produce public recognition and

appreciation. And we have the advantage that more and more recent graduates, who are taking their places in metropolitan power structures, attended our institutions.

New definitions of academic prestige and eminence must be formed to accommodate the new model. The Carnegie Foundation taxonomy of higher education institutions provides no adequate niche for this large group of institutions. Other popular classifications, such as the annual ranking of institutions by *U.S. News and World Report*, categorize rankings on bases that do not serve the academy well.

This new journal, *Metropolitan Universities*, will seek to provide an opportunity for dialogue on the metropolitan university model in order to clarify better the philosophical variations on the model, to discuss the challenges we face both internally and externally, and to share successful and not so successful interactive strategies between the university and its environment. The dialogue will of necessity encompass all of the issues that our society faces, plus those that are unique to the academy.

This article is not intended to speak at length to the various implications that flow from accepting the metropolitan model, but more simply to bring to the attention of the many potential metropolitan universities the significance of the role they can assume as we approach the twenty-first century. All institutions cannot fit easily within the model. All that might do so will not choose the model. But the vision of the metropolitan model is one in which many institutions may seek recognition and prestige. The vision can be a liberating one, allowing us to be evaluated on the basis of what we

choose rather than against criteria established for other institutions at other times. It can free us to cooperate enthusiastically with other institutions (public and private) whose mission differs from ours but with whom a combination of resources can bring mutual rewards. It can free us from destructive competition with dissimilar institutions within our state systems and thus enable us to respond to appropriate public concerns regarding unnecessary duplication. Finally, the vision can be a satisfying one by allowing us to achieve eminence based not on being second- or third-tier copy of someone else's vision, but excelling within our own.

Metropolitan universities are agents of change. These institutions must play a role in the transformation of society, but the transformation is not unilateral. Just as the university is a transformer of the society of which it is a part, so it will be transformed by that society.

It is important for the metropolitan university to define clearly and to control the interactions that occur within the metropolitan environment. Only if the university is willing to assume leadership in defining such interactions can the institution guard and maintain the independence that is essential and necessary for all universities. This independence cannot be yielded. The university must develop a clear understanding of when it should turn down what may appear to be a window of opportunity. The metropolitan university must be able to say "no" in its own best interest. However, the metropolitan university must also remain constantly in contact with its environment and be alert to opportunities to say "yes" by creating interactive initiatives that serve the interests of both the university and the metropolitan area.

Protecting traditional values must not be defined as maintaining the status quo. The transformation of metropolitan universities is likely to involve a basic reconsideration of our traditional discipline-centered mentality. Solutions to current metropolitan problems will not come via a breakthrough in an isolated laboratory but through the patient application of skills by scholars working together in a variety of disciplines.

In the course of our transformation, our metropolitan universities will have to reconsider internal priorities and reward systems. Our institutions owe their existence to the need for access, and teaching must therefore be our first priority.

More than any other institutions, universities located in the metropolitan areas have a special role to assume in preparing our students to live in our pluralistic society. Historically, minority and disadvantaged groups have migrated to our cities, and the metropolitan universities will always have a large population of

diverse students. We will face the challenge of helping students, not always well prepared, to succeed in university studies. As these new populations enter metropolitan universities, we must develop the necessary support structures to ensure their success. And we must broaden the understanding by our majority students in order that they may accept and appreciate the diversity of a more pluralistic society.

Our reward system will have an important impact on determining faculty activity. The current policies on promotion, tenure, and merit salary increases served our institutions well in the past but now require serious reconsideration. All research has always been for some purpose, some ultimate application. But the time lapse between inquiry and application has so shortened as to make the distinction between pure and applied research meaningless. The importance of the problem tackled and the quality of the work performed must become more significant factors in evaluations than is the artificial, traditional distinction between pure and applied scholarship. Similarly, professional service—the application of one's disciplinary skills to real problems in the real world—must receive more than the lip service it has traditionally been accorded.

In *New Priorities for the University*, Lynton and Elman make the case clearly and convincingly: "The institutionalization of a reward structure for faculty engaged in such activity does not imply a reduction in the importance of traditional scholarship. Rather it elevates to a comparable level of esteem—and subjects to a comparable level of quality control—a broad continuum of knowledge-related scholarly activities. We believe that the quality of the academic environment will be enhanced through close reciprocal relationships between strong teaching, traditional scholarship, and externally oriented professional activities, with the whole being greater than the sum of the parts." (ibid, pp. 148-149) Surely the time has come to cease talking about a more appropriate reward system and to begin demonstrating to faculty *by performance* that we are serious about a change.

Though it is not likely that all disciplines within the academy will share equally in interaction with the metropolitan area, we must hold out the vision for all. One might anticipate that colleges and schools that offer professional programs will most easily establish symbiotic relationships with the region. However, all disciplines should be challenged to consider the possibility of such interactions, must be encouraged to shape the nature of their interactions, and must be nurtured and rewarded for their effort.

The disciplines that resonate to a more conservative and traditional form of scholarship and service must not be punished or

restricted but can and should be challenged to reexamine their current assumptions. They must be challenged not to withdraw toward a more conservative (or defensive) stance but instead to play an active role in defining the measures by which we will judge contributions to scholarship and professional service on this broader basis.

Elman and Lynton point out that this asks a great deal of the academy: "If universities are to respond more systematically to external knowledge needs they must raise, rather than diminish, the intellectual standards and challenges for both their institutions as a whole and for participating members. . . . For universities to carry out their expanded scholarly function and to provide competence-oriented teaching, faculty must be *more* than scholars in a discipline, not *less*; they must be scholars with a broad perspective on the interrelationship of disciplines and their practical applications." (ibid, p. 134)

Metropolitan universities will not come into full being without the leadership of the president, chief academic officer, deans, and key faculty. The president and chief academic officer must assume the responsibility of educating the faculty on the wisdom of embracing the metropolitan model, helping to shape a mission statement clearly stating the purpose of the institution with respect to the metropolitan environment and devising a strategic plan to achieve the mission. Both leaders must join together to assure that budgetary allocations are directed toward the strategic plan. George Keller has put it well: "An academic strategy asserts that neither willfulness nor acquiescence to the fashions and temporary external conditions is an appropriate course. Rather a university's own directions and objectives need to be shaped in light of an emerging national situation and new external factors as well as the perennial needs of youth, truth, and intelligence. And because the external environment is in constant flux, strategic planning must be continuous, pervasive and indigenous. . . ." (Academic Strategy, p. 145)

The university best serves itself and society by assuming an active leadership role.

The concept of the metropolitan university can provide a worthy vision for many institutions that seek a niche within which they can provide opportunities for faculty and students, while at the same time providing the prospect of institutional pride and success. Committing an institution to the model does not require vast new resources. Although Title XI may hold some promise of funds for universities to provide for the needs of our population centers, metropolitan universities cannot afford to wait for federal funding to

begin those interactions with metropolitan areas that are needed now. The tenor of our times is such that significant funding of Title XI is not likely to occur, and metropolitan universities must selectively focus their own resources toward building symbiotic partnerships.

A frequently misattributed Old Testament Proverb (29:18) advises us, "Where there is no vision, the people perish." We in higher education can continue doing business in the same old ways, and we are not likely to perish. But the metropolitan vision can afford us the opportunity to help our students and faculty achieve their highest potential while at the same time improving the quality of life for most Americans—and can bring institutional success and satisfaction, as well.

Suggested Reading

Grobman, Arnold. *Urban State Universities: An Unfinished Agenda*. New York: Praeger, 1988.

Keller, George C. *Academic Strategy: The Management Revolution in American Higher Education*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983.

Lynton, Ernest A., and Sandra Elman. *New Priorities for the University*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 1987.

Newman, Frank. *Choosing Quality: Reducing Conflict Between the State and the University*. Denver: Education Commission of the States, 1987.