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Metropolitan universities are characterized by extensive involvement with various constituencies and communities, including their contiguous neighborhood, the metropolitan business community, the minority communities, the local public schools, local governmental agencies, the professional communities, and area colleges and universities. The limits and costs of this involvement are discussed, and recommendations for planning are provided. Metropolitan universities, while primarily centers for teaching and research, also serve as cultural centers for the community, as employers and consumers, as providers of social services, and as catalysts for social and economic development. The ivory tower metaphor of detached scholarship simply does not characterize metropolitan universities.

Diverse Communities

Diverse Involvements

One characteristic of a metropolitan university that distinguishes it from other institutions of higher learning is its extensive involvement with and its impact on the metropolitan community it serves. A metropolitan university may be located on a campus in the downtown area of the city, as is Roosevelt University in Chicago, or it may be slightly outside the business district on its own separate campus, as are the University of Massachusetts at Boston and the University of Illinois at Chicago. It may be bordered by an affluent residential community, such as Beacon Hill in Boston or Georgetown in Washington, or an impoverished one; it may be proximate to commercial or industrial neighbors. Metropolitan universities are either independent or are intimately connected with the larger metropolitan community.

Extensive involvement with the community is often initiated by the metropolitan university, and some is initiated by others who seek to have it serve a specific purpose with which they are involved, such as improved schools, neighborhood stabilization, or economic growth. Most community involvement is cordial, cooperative, and collaborative as the university and the community work together to advance parallel and mutually beneficial interests. Community interaction can involve negotiated agreements or litigation where competing interests are at stake. Far from being an ivory tower removed or detached from the surrounding world, the metropolitan university is an enterprise embedded in the community and linked to its environment by a complex web of relationships, expectations, mutual needs, and opportunities for benefit. The extent and intensity of these involvements distinguish

the urban or metropolitan university from other categories of American higher education.

Ways in Which Metropolitan Universities Interact with Their Communities

A metropolitan university's involvements with and its service to its many communities derive from the various aspects of the university. Primarily it is an institution of higher education that provides instruction in many disciplines. A metropolitan university serves undergraduate, graduate, and professional students of all ages, levels, and backgrounds, reflecting the variety of the wider community. It assists in the development and application of new knowledge and in technology transfer, providing continuing education to many constituencies and advice to businesses small and large, to government agencies, and to community groups. Metropolitan universities also serve as cultural centers, providing concerts, plays, lectures, readings, and films that are open to the public, often free or with nominal charge. They frequently provide consulting services of various kinds: for example, aiding the public school system and reaching out to primary and secondary school students; stimulating volunteer service by students, faculty, staff, and alumni; and serving as a neutral convener or coordinator for bringing together interested parties who have no history of working together.

A metropolitan university constitutes a substantial physical and economic presence with substantial economic impact: as a large and relatively stable, progressive, and environmentally clean employer; as a consumer of goods and services including large scale expenditures for construction, renovation, and equipment; and through secondary spending by students, faculty, staff, as well as parents and other visitors. A metropolitan university may also be a partner in local real estate development and in the commercial application of new knowledge. Each of these multiple aspects or dimensions of a metropolitan university affects its interaction with the constituencies of its region. In turn, in each aspect of their many-faceted relationships, metropolitan universities must take into account the ethnic and racial diversity of their regions. Most metropolitan areas in this country, as well as many such conurbations abroad, contain several distinct communities of color as well as a number of white ethnic groups. Each of these groups is likely to have its own leadership, community activities, and social service organizations. In order to be successful as academic institutions and as neighbors, employers, and consumers, metropolitan universities need to be sensitive to different and at times competing priorities and needs of these multiple constituencies. They should

reflect the diversity of the metropolitan area in their faculty and staff, as well as in their student body, and they should reach out to the diverse groups in many different ways.

By inviting the leaders of the various ethnic and racial minority communities to visit the campus and speak to student groups, by encouraging the parents and families of current and prospective minority students to visit the campus and share in the celebration of special holidays and festivals, by meeting with minority business groups and hiring their members, by becoming personally visible in the minority communities, and by showing that cultural diversity is not only tolerated but actively encouraged and cherished, presidents of metropolitan universities can promote a climate that will enhance the effectiveness of their institutions both in their academic roles as well as in their function as neighbor, employer, and consumer.

Metropolitan Universities and Their Neighbors

Most metropolitan universities are located in areas adjacent or contiguous to non-university neighbors. Prior to the 1950s the urban university's relations with its neighbors tended to be characterized either by mutual disinterest or tolerance. If the university desired to acquire and develop an additional piece of property or city block, the surrounding community was not organized to express objections or concerns, and tenants were resigned to such treatment, as the history of Suffolk University demonstrates.

When Gleason Archer, the founding president of Suffolk University, in 1920 bought a parcel of land in Boston, behind the State House in what was then "the West End," on which he planned to build a new building for his law school, no one expressed concern when he evicted the nineteen families then living on the site. He voluntarily but grudgingly offered modest assistance in helping some of the families relocate in order to gain earlier access to the property and accelerate the demolition schedule but didn't consider them as having any rights in the situation.

By the mid-50s, a protracted period of neighborhood neglect extending through the depression and war years, together with the demographic shift due to immigration from the rural south to the inner cities of the north, led to the conclusion that many urban neighborhoods had become blighted and that cities could be saved by excising such decay before it spread. Congress passed urban renewal legislation that was used by cities, by universities, and by developers to level large parcels of shabby housing. Occupants were relocated either to fortress-like public housing units or dispersed to outlying suburbs.

By the 1960s, tenants and home owners began to organize to oppose urban renewal and university expansion. Often students sided with local residents in town-gown confrontations with the community. For the first time, urban and campus planners encountered organized opposition to university expansion and relocation, and Suffolk University felt this shift too. In 1968 Archer's successor, Judge John Fenton, the fifth president of Suffolk University, assumed that he could ignore community concern over his plans to develop and occupy a building proximate to the university's other buildings. To his surprise, he was blocked in court by the local residents.

Thus, as a reaction to the unconstrained dislocation of people during the 1950s and the empowerment of neighborhood groups, the "Robert Moses era" of campus planning came to an end. Some universities learned the lesson more slowly and painfully than others: it is imperative for metropolitan universities to establish cordial relations with their neighbors and to negotiate a mutually agreeable *modus vivendi*. In some settings, so high a level of suspicion, animosity, and antagonism had developed that a decade or more was necessary to restore a climate in which the parties could begin to work together effectively to resolve lingering disputes and develop an agenda of mutual interests and common goals. Indeed, it took two decades to the month after Suffolk University acquired a lot and building on Cambridge Street in Boston, where it had expected to construct without delay a multistory academic building, for a settlement agreement with abutters and other litigants to be signed, paving the way for a project of more modest scale and vastly greater sensitivity to the surrounding architecture and to neighborhood concerns.

Metropolitan universities have come to appreciate that they cannot take neighborhood relations for granted or attend to them only when the institution desires to expand or has a public relations crisis. Community leaders and neighbors are a constituency that cannot be neglected. Most of the larger metropolitan universities have offices of community relations, often headed by a vice-president, to maintain dialogue, handle extensive negotiations between the university and the community, and seek to have university's neighbors experience the university in positive ways, as a provider of cultural activities, jobs, public safety, and other benefits. At smaller metropolitan universities the president is apt to be directly involved in community relations on a weekly and sometimes daily basis, attending community events and social functions and inviting community leaders to the campus for public lectures and theatrical programs.

If the university is on a campus created by demolishing homes in the community, it may take a generation before good relations are restored. If a metropolitan university is insensitive to the impact that the comings and goings of students, delivery trucks, and service vehicles have on the neighborhood or if the university allows subcontractors working on campus construction or renovation to operate noisy equipment during evening hours, convenient perhaps to the contractor but grossly inconvenient to the residents, the university risks a permanent state of crisis and tension between itself and its neighbors.

The circumstances are considerably different, of course, if the university's neighbors are commercial or industrial or if it is walled off from its neighbors by highways and other urban obstacles. If the university is in a particularly deteriorated area or adjacent to an industrial zone, it may want to initiate economic development activities in conjunction with other stakeholders to revitalize and upgrade its neighborhood. These activities may take the form of investment in local real estate or shopping centers, the creation of a research park, or improvements in the urban streetscape.

For example, in 1976 Suffolk University, working with the City of Boston, local residents, the State House, and a local architect sensitive to the issues of urban design, used funds made available to the city under a HUD block grant to transform Temple Street, a narrow, early nineteenth century street fronting several of Suffolk University's buildings, from a congested parking strip for legislators' cars into an attractive and award-winning, brick lined pedestrian walkway with trees, flowers, and a pocket park, enjoyed by area residents as well as by students and legislators strolling to classes and offices. Temple Street residents and the university together maintain the plantings and appearance of the street, which is featured in many of the university's publications. In 1989 Suffolk University took steps to initiate a Main Street Project (a program of the National Trust for Historic Preservation for the rehabilitation of urban shopping strips) together with local merchants and residents, a city councilor, and merchants from other successful Main Street projects, as a means of improving Cambridge Street, a rundown commercial artery bordering the Beacon Hill historic district and Suffolk University.

Neighbors should experience a university in positive ways.

Whatever the specific circumstances, relations with the contiguous community are of paramount importance for a metropolitan university. They are a significant part of its activities; they require high-level and highly trained personnel and adequate resources,

and they must be factored by the university into virtually every development decision.

Metropolitan Universities as Employers and Consumers

Metropolitan universities with substantial budgets are major economic enterprises. It is not uncommon for an urban or metropolitan university to be among the larger and more progressive employers in the city. Although untenured faculty, as well as individuals in support positions and those dependent on "soft money" may occasionally feel the impact of enrollment shortfalls (in the independent sector) or reduced appropriations (in the public sector), university employment is on the whole relatively stable. Universities can often compensate for their inability to compete in direct salaries with private industry or law firms for professional and support personnel by providing such indirect benefits as academic environment, tuition benefits, and ready access to courses, concerts, films, and lectures that make the universities attractive places to work. Moreover, many metropolitan universities have been on the forefront of such issues as child care, personal leave for family health needs, staff development, and the recruitment of minorities.

Metropolitan universities also contribute significantly to the local economy through their direct purchases of goods and services, through secondary spending by their staff and students, and through auxiliary and spinoff enterprises.

Relations with the Metropolitan Business Community

The local business community is a significant constituency for a metropolitan university. It hires the university's graduates; provides students with part-time employment, internships, and placements for cooperative education programs; and is a source of participants in instruction designed for individuals with full-time jobs, such as MBA programs and offerings in continuing education. The private sector can benefit a metropolitan university in many other ways. It can provide helpful advice in program development, enter into contractual agreements for specialized training programs for its employees, and be a source of adjunct faculty and guest lecturers. It can, as well, provide direct support of funds and equipment.

The advantages flow in the opposite direction as well. The business community has much to gain from a vigorous metropolitan university of high quality. Such an institution is a source of highly skilled employees who will be increasingly in demand. It can contribute much to the maintenance of employees' competence through a variety of advanced courses and specialized in-service

programs. Furthermore, metropolitan universities can be an important source of state-of-the-art expertise in a great variety of fields. Its meetings and conferences, as well as its library and data bases, are readily accessible to members of local business. The university's faculty as well as its advanced students can provide technical assistance, policy analysis, and technology transfer that can help new industrial ventures to gain a foothold and existing enterprises to keep up to date. Strong metropolitan universities often are magnets that attract commerce and industry to their region, because of these potential benefits they can provide. It should also be mentioned that in many metropolitan areas, the local universities and the business community are partners in school reform and in urban revitalization.

Indeed, metropolitan universities can have so many points of interaction with local businesses that a special effort is needed to keep track of these contracts in a systematic fashion. When a senior university administrator visits a corporate executive, that administrator would be embarrassed not to be aware of existing relationships. Therefore, Suffolk University developed a monthly coordinating meeting at which the various university officers who have extensive contacts with the business community share information. Regular participants in these meetings include the dean of the School of Management, the director of management training programs, development, and alumni office staff, and the directors of career services and cooperative education, among others.

To foster mutually beneficial interaction, the presidents of metropolitan universities should become acquainted with other major business leaders in a variety of ways, including participation in activities of the Chamber of Commerce and similar groups. They should, as well, invite members of the business community onto their campuses to better acquaint them with the role, scope, and capabilities of their institutions; to explore potential areas in which cooperation would bring advantages to both sides; and to discuss issues of mutual concern.

Relations with the Local School Systems

Another "community" with which a metropolitan university interacts, often in conjunction with the business community, is the public school system. Historically, few colleges and universities made a strong effort to relate to the public schools in their community, other than to place student teachers. In metropolitan university areas this has now begun to change. Metropolitan universities have recognized their stake in the improvement of urban schools. The schools are the source of students going on to college, a fact so obvious that it would hardly need stating, had it not

been overlooked for so long. If the urban schools are not assisted in their efforts to improve, metropolitan universities will be drawn ever more heavily into remedial work and will fail to receive a major segment of urban students who might have benefited from a college education but instead became drop-out casualties. Much more devastating than the effect on the colleges is the effect on those whose learning is stifled by the multiple troubles besetting urban education in most of the nation's large cities.

Boston serves as an example of what is beginning to happen in school-university-business collaboration in various cities and is a model for other cities where there are educators and business leaders forging new alliances for their mutual advantage. In 1974, as part of a court-initiated settlement of a desegregation suit, the public schools in Boston were each paired with one or more of the local universities and colleges. The pairings were supported with state funds, but came to be supported as well by foundation and other grants raised by the universities for this purpose. The collaborative programs made possible by these pairings provide assistance to teachers and school staff, special instruction and tutoring of students, aid to the central administration, and even programs for parents. The twenty-three Boston-area colleges and universities participating in these pairings

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form the Boston Higher Education Partnership, which now has its own executive director. Each university appoints a coordinator to manage the relationship between the participating university faculty and the schools. The university presidents, the coordinators, and the director of the Partnership meet regularly with the superintendent of schools and other school personnel to discuss priorities, plan new programs, and air concerns.

In 1984, a formal agreement was signed between the colleges and the schools calling for an increased commitment by the colleges to helping the schools and their college-bound graduates, as well as attention to improving the retention rates of students, both in the schools and in the colleges. Since then, over \$35 million has been invested by the participating Boston-area universities and colleges in the form of scholarships for graduates of the Boston Public Schools, non-state funds raised for collaborative programs, and other direct aid. Retention of Boston high school graduates attending universities in the partnership had also improved, although not by as much as had been desired.

Complementing the agreement between the universities and the schools is an agreement between the business community and

the schools. Many of the major businesses are also paired with a local school and provide direct assistance of various kinds, as well as instructional equipment. An endowment of approximately \$13 million has been contributed by the business community to provide "last-dollar scholarships" for Boston high school graduates going on to college, counselors in the high schools to help students complete the various college application and financial aid forms and meet the necessary deadlines, and grants to teachers for supplemental instructional funds not available in the regular school budget.

Faculty members at Suffolk University have provided for its high school partner supplemental instruction for physics students in computer technology. The school gets to keep the computers assembled by the students during the semester. Faculty members also offer instruction in political science and international affairs. Under the federal Literacy Corps program, a dozen Suffolk University students are tutoring elementary school students in basic reading skills in a multi-racial inner city school in which many children of new immigrant families are learning English before their parents do. Suffolk University is also working with a group of school parents and teachers and provides scholarships for the graduates of the Boston public schools and local community colleges.

The set of agreements among the business community, higher education institutions, and schools is known as The Boston Compact. Higher education leaders and business leaders work directly with the superintendent of schools and the mayor as a steering committee for the compact. This joint effort has already had a significant impact on the quality of the educational opportunity available to Boston Public School students and graduates. It has encouraged, fostered, and facilitated collaboration and beneficial contact among the universities, the schools, and the business community.

Relations with City and County Governments

Many metropolitan universities have developed close ties and productive working relations with local governmental bodies and agencies. The universities undertake sponsored research for these agencies; they provide policy analysis and other forms of expertise, conduct training programs for their employees, and collaborate with them in various ways. Local government agencies are also sources of funding as well as sources of necessary approvals needed by metropolitan universities for their development. It is important for the president of a metropolitan university to be on good terms with local government leaders and agency heads. In the case of certain municipally sponsored metropolitan universities, such as Washburn

University in Topeka, the mayor serves as an ex-officio member of the governing board.

Some cities, particularly those without a large industrial base, have pressed the colleges and universities within their borders for annual payments in lieu of taxes. Boston has been particularly aggressive in such requests, particularly targeting the tax-exempt independent universities and hospitals. Boston zoning is hostile to higher education, requiring that every change in a college or university's use of property it owns must be granted a specific variance by the Zoning Board of Appeal. The zoning appeal process provides an opportunity for the city and neighborhood groups to make requests of the institution that are often tantamount to demands. Typically, zoning appeals are granted only when the institution agrees to participate in the city's "PILOT" (payments in lieu of taxes) program. Recent regulations require that approval of construction projects in excess of 100,000 square feet be contingent on "linkage" payments to the city, to be used for neighborhood development. Most of the colleges and universities in Boston have thus been required to make agreements with the city either for direct payments in lieu of taxes based on enrollment or indirect payments that include scholarships for the graduates of the Boston public high schools and city employees. At least one metropolitan institution, Emerson College, has made plans to move out of Boston, in part to avoid pressure of this sort.

Relations with Professional Communities

A metropolitan university interacts with the many professional groups present in every urban area—lawyers and legal aids, health professionals, accountants, and others—to provide initial and continuing education, and interacts with professional artists and arts groups to provide a place for the performance, exhibition, and teaching of the arts. Representatives of these groups often serve on departmental or school advisory committees, speak to classes, counsel students or serve as mentors, judge student competitions, help recruit students, sponsor scholarships, and hire graduates. Close links with the professional communities are another hallmark of metropolitan universities.

Relations with Other Area Colleges and Universities

In a listing of the groups and organizations with which the president and other officers of a metropolitan university are involved, mention should be made of the other colleges and universities in the urban area. Many cities have developed formal mechanisms for collaboration among the colleges and universities in the

area. In addition, there are often regular meetings of subgroups of these colleges and universities. The public college presidents and those of the independent universities and colleges generally each have regular meetings to plan and coordinate government relations and to participate in common or jointly sponsored activities. These activities may include cross-registering courses, serving on the board of an educational television station, or protecting civil rights, literacy, volunteerism, or drug awareness. Although competition among colleges continues in many ways, collaboration has come to be the more dominant mode of interaction in many settings and is the stance most commonly taken by the university presidents towards one another.

Limitations and Cost of a University's Involvement

Although metropolitan universities are characterized by their interest in and involvement with their communities and although they are eager to be of service as centers of knowledge and culture and helpful in other ways too, there are limits on the abilities, resources, and responsiveness of metropolitan universities. Moreover, a university as an enduring institution may have a long-range time perspective, and its faculty as scholars of their disciplines may have a detachment that will give them a viewpoint or perspective different from others'.

Tensions between any of the metropolitan constituencies and the university often arise because of unrealistic or unreasonable demands on the institution to remedy the community's economic and social problems. During the 1960s, encouraged or emboldened by government or foundation funding, some universities undertook educational, social-welfare, or applied research projects that promised more than could be delivered, heightening community expectations beyond what could be achieved and causing a frustration, cynicism, or anger. Caution, candor, and circumspection must be exercised in this respect.

A metropolitan university's involvement with the community, however desirable, and whether self-initiated or imposed, is not without cost. There are staff costs, for full-time community relations specialists and for the part-time involvement of many others in the university, not least the president; there are such additional financial costs as payments-in-lieu-of-taxes, scholarships for the graduates of local schools, and the operation of day care centers or other facilities, including the library, which may be accessible or available to non-university neighbors and the wider community. Suffolk University, for example, has maintained a policy of keeping its libraries open and accessible to residents of the neighboring

Beacon Hill community, local businesses, alumni, and the students of other universities in the Boston area—except during the period immediately before and during final exams.

There are also public relations costs that are incurred from time to time, especially if there are misunderstandings, unfulfilled or unrealistic expectations, clashes of competing interests and “offers that can’t be refused.” All of these things are part of the complexity of administering a contemporary metropolitan university.

Metropolitan Universities Are Where the Action Is

The difficulty and cost that result from multiple tasks and the many interactions of metropolitan universities should not be minimized. But it is important, as well, to realize that these institutions are at the cutting edge of American higher education. Their overall impact, in terms of the number and diversity of students served and their ability to positively affect the wider community, is unsurpassed by other sectors of higher education. Because of the multiple opportunities they have to serve, metropolitan universities are gaining increased attention, influence, prominence, and recognition, and they are having an expanded and beneficial impact.

It is the extensive community involvement of metropolitan universities and the creative energies they liberate that makes them such exciting and interesting places for their students, the faculty who teach in them, and those who administer them.

Suggested Readings

- “Town and Gown.” *Current Issues in Catholic Higher Education*. Vol. 6, no. 2 (Winter, 1986).
- Ross, Bernard H. *University-City Relations: From Coexistence to Cooperation*. ERIC Higher Education Research Report No. 3. Washington, American Association for Higher Education, 1973.