

*Urban universities can distinguish themselves by addressing today's critical urban issues through new ways of combining teaching, research, and service, and by working in partnership with others on comprehensive and integrated approaches. The University of Illinois at Chicago is pursuing this by means of the Great Cities concept: an institutional commitment to meeting the needs of the metropolitan area. Key factors in establishing such a mission and partnership process in a complex urban environment are leadership, broad-based participation, and realism.*

# **Urban and Metropolitan Universities:**

## *Leaders of the 21st Century*

Whenever I travel, people always ask me what's going on in Chicago. So I thought I'd pass along a few news items that have a bearing on the role of urban and metropolitan universities.

Recently, scientists at Fermilab in Chicago's western suburbs announced they'd found evidence of the top quark, a fundamental subatomic particle. More than 400 researchers had been searching for this particle for 17 years at a cost of hundreds of millions of dollars. And now they believe they have found it. It's about one trillionth the thickness of a human hair and it lasts for about a trillionth of a trillionth of a second. This is a major accomplishment in particle physics, and it shows what academic researchers can do when they put their minds to something. I think we should all tip our hats to the physicists who made this happen, and I will tell you quite frankly that I'm happy this took place in Illinois and not in some other state.

Here's another story you may have seen out of Chicago. There's a gang war going on. Every few days, there's another story of an innocent victim being killed by gang cross fire. Vince Lane, a friend of mine, chairman of the Chicago Housing Authority, wanted to search the public housing apartments for guns. You may have seen stories about that, too. Many of the tenants supported him, but the federal courts said it would violate their constitutional rights. Almost every Chicagoan is familiar with the name of Dantrell Davis, a little boy who was shot by a sniper in a public housing project on his way to school. And Joseph Wallace, a three-year-old who was hanged by his mentally disturbed mother after the state's children's ser-

vices agency took him away from his foster parents and returned him to her.

Then there was a story about a new Motorola plant that's being built in Harvard, Illinois, a good 50 miles from Chicago. The city made a bid for the plant, but it never had a chance. It seemed to symbolize the exodus of jobs and residents from Chicago, which was chronicled in the *Chicago Tribune* last year.

Many of you can relate similar stories about your own cities. Only the names – and sometimes the magnitude – change from city to city.

I'd like to suggest that we apply the same energy, brainpower and resources to the problems of the cities that we have applied with such success to particle physics. I suppose this is another way of saying, "If we can put a man on the moon, we can solve the crime problem, or the poverty problem or the drug problem." A lot of academics have rejected that idea. They say it's simplistic, and perhaps it is. But it could be that they're making excuses for their reluctance to come to grips with problems that are so messy and seemingly *un-academic*. There is no "elegant" solution to the problem of teenage pregnancy, but that doesn't absolve academics from working on the problem.

Frankly, we don't have much choice. The continued existence of public universities depends on continued public support. And to maintain public support, we must deal with issues that are relevant to the public, through our teaching, research and public service programs. That was the philosophy behind the Morrill Act, which gave rise to the Land-Grant universities. Then, the relevant issues were agriculture and the mechanical arts. Today, the relevant issues are health care, elementary and secondary education, jobs and economic development and crime. They're urban issues.

The original land-grant universities did a masterful job on agriculture and engineering. Our farmers are the most efficient and productive in the world, and students from all over the world come to this country to study engineering and science. We haven't closed the book on agriculture, and we certainly have a lot more to learn in the areas of engineering and big science. So the traditional land-grant universities – Purdue, Michigan State, my sister campus in Urbana-Champaign – are not about to wither away.

But the critical issues of today and the foreseeable future – soaring health care costs, increasing poverty, overcrowded jails, crumbling infrastructure – belong to the kinds of universities we represent, the urban and metropolitan universities. We need to become a partner with government and others in addressing these issues – not by taking over the role of others, but by using our particular expertise. And if we act decisively, we have the opportunity to assume leadership of the academic community in the 21st century. Those of us in urban areas are uniquely situated to respond, first of all because of our location. We are where the societal problems are.

Of course, researchers from universities in the small towns and rural areas can, and do, come into the cities to have a look around, conduct their studies and then return to their campuses to sort out their information. But they can never have the extended interaction with urban communities the way our universities can. They cannot build the lasting alliances, they cannot maintain the longstanding relationships with neighborhood, governmental, and civic groups the way we can.

Peter Magrath, the president of NASULGC, put it this way during a recent visit to my campus. He noted that the role of UIC -- and, by implication, of similar urban universities – "is not to be 'in the city,' but to be part of the city – to be in partnership with the city, its civic and community groups, and most essentially, its business and corporate interests."

At the same time, we have to remember that metropolitan areas are not just the places where societal problems are most concentrated and visible. Metropolitan areas also are the sources of the world's creativity and vitality and the key engines of economic growth. In spite of the problems that exist, metropolitan workers are more productive and earn higher wages, than those elsewhere. Metropolitan areas continue to be the seed beds of innovation and risk taking. In spite of telecommuting and instant communications, there even continues to be a critical role for the face-to-face contact among thousands of specialized experts that only the downtowns of major cities provide.

### The Land Grant Tradition

Our direct involvement in urban issues is of course a direct extension of the land grant tradition that many of us here share. The land grant mission has traditionally been described as the performance of teaching, research, and service. This formulation has given rise to two problems:

- By talking about three functions, a separation between them has developed. Teaching, research, and service are each seen as distinct, conducted at different times, different schedules, for different clienteles and purposes, and often funded in different ways.
- Along with the distinction has come a hierarchy. Obviously, research has been king of the mountain, even though teaching has always remained sacred in some places and is increasingly making a comeback. Service invariably comes last. For many of us, it is becoming clear that we need an integrating concept, something that brings out the strength of the *combined* functions of teaching, research, and service, and harnesses the *combined* efforts of universities, corporations, civic organizations, and governments.

One particular strength the university brings to this partnership is the capacity for *integration*. Governments, and many other agencies, usually deal with societal problems in segmented, sectoral ways. But increasingly researchers are recognizing the interconnectedness of problems. A house does not make a neighborhood. Solving the affordable housing problem does not necessarily improve education, public safety, or health. The effect of offering literacy classes or job training, while everything else in a person's life is in trouble, is likely to be short lived, at best. If we are going to be effective in dealing with urban issues, we have to overcome our own barriers in academia and find ways to bring people together in interdisciplinary work.

Another aspect of this integration is to deal with the barriers between teaching, research, and service. In our best work, these are combined seamlessly, in cooperation with others. In her book *The University and its Publics*, Mary Lindenstein Walshok describes this as developing "knowledge linkages," the closer connection between knowledge-producers and knowledge-users. Knowledge can flow in the form of development ("research"), dissemination ("teaching"), or application ("service"). The key here, of course, is that these activities have more in common (the knowledge linkage) than divides them.

If the university is about creating opportunities to develop knowledge linkages, it becomes easier to see that the activities usually captured under the distinct categories of teaching, research, and service, can in fact be seen as spanning a range. In some fields, new knowledge may best be created by a single researcher working in a laboratory, but this is increasingly rare. In other fields, knowledge is created in the interaction between instructor and students, or in the context of a field experiment or service project where the process of application is part of the object of study. Depending on the discipline, the skills and interests of the faculty member, and at dif-

ferent times in their careers, these emphases may change.

Central to all conceptions of knowledge linkage is an acknowledgement of the value of knowledge, but also the belief that knowledge by itself, without any linkage, is insufficient. Especially for public universities, the development of knowledge for its own sake is no longer sufficient. While no one would accept a narrow, utilitarian definition of the purposes for which knowledge should be developed, we should accept that the public, in supporting us, has the right to demand that we concern ourselves with the public good, the public purposes, to which our knowledge can contribute.

This formulation also recognizes that universities are not the sole developers or repositories of knowledge. Corporations, civic organizations, governments, all develop their own particular forms of knowledge, some of which are quite similar to what universities develop, while other forms are different in that they are more often process-oriented, perhaps time-and space-limited, but nevertheless highly relevant and indeed essential for functioning in specific situations. Knowledge linkage implies that information can flow both ways.

Our corporate, civic, and academic constituencies can thus be seen as partners in this knowledge linkage. As partners, we are together engaged in the process of developing, disseminating and applying knowledge with the goal of enhancing the vitality and viability of our communities and urban areas.

There are political advantages to this approach. The community organizations, civic groups, local political leaders, and corporate sector all can help us make our case politically. Thus, while doing good, we will also be doing well.

### The Great Cities Concept

At UIC last December, we inaugurated our Great Cities program. The Great Cities concept must be understood within this broader context of the mission and functions of the public university. Great Cities provides a focus for UIC's efforts at knowledge linkage. In this way, UIC will become a model for a land-grant university in an urban setting. UIC comprises thousands of faculty and staff members and hundreds of units. The Great Cities concept provides a focus and organizing principle for what many of our faculty and staff are already doing, and it expresses an institutional commitment to work that addresses human needs in Chicago and other metropolitan areas.

At the same time, Great Cities speaks of cities in the plural, because we cannot be parochial. The knowledge we create and disseminate may build on learning developed elsewhere and about other urban settings; it should similarly be of value elsewhere.

UIC already has many activities that reflect the Great Cities focus. These include:

- the work of the University of Illinois Hospital and Clinics, serving almost 400,000 patients annually;
- a medical school that graduates more minority physicians than any other university;
- projects such as The Nation of Tomorrow, a partnership between the Colleges of Education, Social Work, and Nursing to implement and evaluate a comprehensive school-based intervention program;
- our work with the city government of Chicago in areas as diverse as serving the aged, training police, and analyzing economic impacts of public programs;

- our technology research, development, and application; and many others.

But we also have significant new initiatives:

- A new College of Urban Planning and Public Affairs to improve the quality of public management and policy. Built on the existing School of Urban Planning and Policy, this college will also increase our ability to address urban issues in an integrated, interdisciplinary way.

- The UIC Neighborhoods Initiative, which is an integrated approach to focus our impact on the neighborhoods immediately adjacent to us. In partnership with community organizations and agencies, we are developing programs in education, health, job training, and business development.

- The Center for Urban Business to assist minority and woman-owned firms, and a Program for Family-Owned Business. We are also working closely with the Chicago Manufacturing Technology Extension Center, through which our Engineering and Business Colleges will assist firms in improving their productivity.

There will be many other initiatives as we go along, such as in the area of health policy and the implementation of health care reform in the metropolitan area; in education, in public safety, and so on. We have also established the Great Cities Faculty Seed Fund to make small grants to faculty for multi-disciplinary applied research and outreach projects.

What does it take for a university to establish this kind of mission and partnership process in a complex urban environment? Based on our experience in Chicago – and I suspect many of you will have found the same in your institution and city – key factors are *leadership, participation, and realism*.

Leadership comes first. “The vision thing,” ridiculed perhaps, still matters, and it has to come from the top. Only presidents and chancellors can make authoritative statements about the mission and future of their institutions *and* allocate the resources to pursue them. This probably works best when one comes in new. But one has to stay with it; there is an attitude among faculty that “this too will pass,” and often they are right. To have a real effect requires consistency, the constant repetition of the idea, and the identification of avenues of change throughout the institution. Another part of leadership is that the idea, the vision, has to be the right one. It must build on the historical character and strength of the institution, yet somehow give it a new twist; and it must fit the needs of the time. In UIC’s case, the Great Cities concept combined our longstanding sense of “urban mission” with our more recent status as a Class I research university. In the past, “urban mission” was often seen as antithetical to being a research university; the knowledge linkage idea and the emphasis on integration of teaching, research, and service give the Great Cities concept a very different flavor.

Planning and participation, while not sufficient, are clearly necessary. At UIC we started with extensive faculty involvement through various advisory committees, subcommittees, and public hearings. Without faculty buy-in, my talk would of course ring hollow pretty soon.

We publicly announced the Great Cities initiative at a forum last December, and received enthusiastic endorsement speeches from Mayor Daley; Vince Lane, chairman of the Chicago Housing Authority; and Peter Magrath, accompanied by prominent newspaper coverage. People described it as the “best day UIC ever had.”

Finally, we’ve tried to be realistic. We can’t overpromise. Rather than talking about “*solving* urban problems” we speak of “*addressing*” them. We emphasize that we can’t do it alone, that we need partners. This is the truth, and it also serves to reduce the fears of those who worry about a wholesale change in the activities of

the university, and especially the allocation of its budget. It also avoids disappointment later.

I think there's a tremendous opportunity here for urban universities. By seizing on urban issues, we can create an identity that will differentiate us from the older, more traditional universities, many of which are located in small or medium-sized towns. We will be dealing with real issues -- crime, taxes, the economy, elementary and secondary education -- the issues that are on people's minds every day of the year. And this, in turn, will generate public and political support which are going to be increasingly necessary in this era of diminishing resources.

And, by the way, we'll actually be doing some good for this country.