

*The success of our cities may well determine the future vitality of this country, and metropolitan universities are one of the last great open doors to opportunity that cities possess.*

# **Metropolitan Universities:**

## *Open Doors to Opportunity*

Historically, the *raison d'être* of colleges and universities has been the preservation, transmittal, interpretation, and enrichment of knowledge. In contemporary society, this requires balanced attention to broadly based education, research, and public service. In recent years, much criticism has been leveled at postsecondary educational institutions. The primary accusation is that universities have developed a life style unique unto themselves, one that is totally irrelevant to the needs of the society they should be serving. Those institutions which have neglected their basic roles and constituencies have neglected their own reason for being.

Today, the increasing complexities of our country's social, economic, political, educational, and cultural systems point toward an ever more important role for higher education, particularly in urban areas. New problems in our rapidly changing society await solution. Metropolitan universities, as never before, are challenged to assist in the solution of these problems and to pioneer new patterns of education that will improve the quality of life for tomorrow's citizens. Institutions of higher education must be environmentally responsive and relate to societal needs. This responsiveness must be reflected in the university's educational programs, research, and public service emanating from a strong faculty.

Recent activities at Washburn University illustrate some of the steps which can be taken. Washburn University is a municipal university in Topeka, Kansas, with an enrolment of about 6,600. It offers baccalaureate and first professional degrees in the arts and sciences and a number of professional fields, including law, business, nursing, and education. Its responsiveness to the needs of its constituencies is reflected in the importance attached to advising, the acceptance of applied research, and the recognition of public service as a criterion for promotion, tenure, and merit increases in salary.

In a metropolitan setting, an emphasis on the cen-

trality of the individual is of particular importance. Any decline in the human qualities of education can lead only to intolerance of and disaffection with the total process. Washburn University therefore approaches the advising process in a holistic manner which integrates testing, orientation, career advising, learning enrichment, developmental education, augmentation to the instructional process, and honors. The advising program also tracks students who are undecided, have intended majors, have declared majors, may change majors, or transfer from other institutions. It is designed to teach students from the time of enrollment through post graduation.

Applied research which attempts to solve some of the problems confronting the City of Topeka and other urban areas, and the active involvement of faculty and staff as participants in community service projects are also being encouraged and accepted. For example, Washburn University has a Small Business Development Center whose purpose is to enhance the success of small businesses of Shawnee and surrounding counties by fostering innovation, expansion, and increased productivity. It also contains a Small Business Institute that provides problem-solving assistance to small businesses, utilizing teams of senior business students under the supervision of faculty.

Responsiveness to local needs as well as to local opportunities has also shaped Washburn's educational programs. By collaborating with the local school corporations, which support the area technical school, Washburn University offers an associate of applied studies degree for nineteen different programs. The area technical school has excellent facilities, is adequately equipped, and has good technical programs. The local county does not have a community or technical college, but there is a need for these types of programs. Washburn provides the general education component and the area school provides the technical expertise. A need is now being met by building on the strengths of the two public institutions and without adding costs to either organization or to the taxpayers. Both entities are perceived as being responsive and accountable to the publics they serve. The Director of the area school was given an adjunct appointment to the School of Applied Studies to assure continued planning, development, and implementation of technical programs.

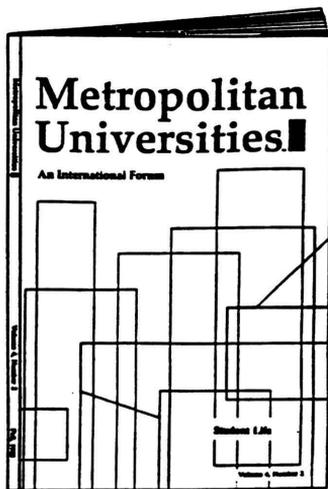
Washburn also reviewed its teacher education program within the context of its mission and decided to concentrate on urban teacher education. By affiliating with the local school corporation and the Comer Center at Yale University, Washburn is now the only postsecondary institution in Kansas which has made this transition and finds itself playing a unique role in the State. In addition, through the public television channel, the University will begin broadcasting programs and courses to the secondary schools in January, 1995. Initially it will offer language and advanced placement courses where dual credit can be received.

The Menninger Foundation, which is located in Topeka and enjoys the reputation of being one of the outstanding psychiatric hospitals in the world, has assembled a staff which is the envy of many major research universities. Building on the joint resources of the Menninger Foundation and Washburn University, a joint Masters Degree in Social Work was developed and has been accredited. The clinical component makes this program very unique. In addition, the Law School is offering a certificate in Mental Health Law, which is also a cooperative endeavor with the Foundation.

Washburn University through its Community Partnership Institute has given top priority to neighborhood redevelopment contiguous to its campus. By working with various civic groups, neighborhood associations, city officials, and business leaders, the areas bordering the campus have been targeted for redevelopment.

These programs are cited as examples of what even a relatively small institution with limited resources can do to enhance its responsiveness to the needs of its region. As is shown by articles in just about every issue of this journal, many other metropolitan universities have undertaken similar initiatives. They, like Washburn University, recognize that the fates of urban areas and metropolitan universities are inextricably intertwined. As a result, metropolitan universities have to be integrated fully into the communities they serve . . . no longer can they be separated physically, intellectually, and emotionally. Their roles have become pivotal as they assume community leadership through involvement in resolving social and environmental problems; providing cultural opportunities; becoming economic generators; forging new partnerships with health care organizations, social agencies, educational institutions, government and businesses; and serving as the generator for ideas for new infrastructures, ecosystems, natural resources, and transportation.

In order to bring about the integration into the communities they serve and the changes to provide an educated citizenry, the metropolitan universities must clearly reflect these goals in their institutional missions and values. These goals have to be communicated widely; understood, accepted and embraced by divergent constituent groups; and implemented by faculty and staff. The internal system of values and priorities which has emphasized traditional modes of teaching and basic research will have to be revisited and some transformation of change must occur from within the universities by forging distinctive and focused missions. Instruction will have to be adapted to meet the needs of both the traditional and non-traditional students, applied research will have to be held in higher esteem, and service to the community weighted more heavily. The metropolitan universities have both an obligation and responsibility to move in this direction.



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