

Most people would agree that metropolitan institutions face unique challenges in the arenas of fund raising, alumni relations, public relations, and other university relations activities. Our alumni are different, our communities are huge and diverse. We compete with dozens of metropolitan-based nonprofit organizations who depend on philanthropists for their resources. Nationally, the nature of our students and alumni and the work of our missions can make us look a little different to major donors and foundations who are well-acquainted with more traditional institutions. However, we often find it difficult to develop unique responses to these challenges and, as in some other arenas of administration, we tend to rely on imitating the advancement models common to traditional institutions. Can or should we change that pattern?

When you look at the wave of organizational change across higher education, there is a massive amount of discussion (and variable amounts of action) on issues of change in curriculum, “the undergraduate experience,” faculty roles and rewards, and even in the characteristics of institutional missions. Finance and administrative support functions have been the frequent object of various management reform strategies, such as total quality management, quality initiatives, and continuous improvement, all meant to improve efficiency.

An interesting question to pose is: “What’s been the impact of the higher education change movement on university relations or institutional advancement units?” Most people I have talked with respond to this question with a look of surprise that conveys something on the lines of “Oh my, we forgot about reforming those departments!” Then they quickly realize they know little about how to critically assess or improve the performance of these units. All most institutions do is count bodies and dollars, which in and of themselves don’t reveal much about what techniques work and why.

This phenomenon is not completely surprising, given that academic work is the very heart of the organization and our reason for being. However, as external public and private support becomes an ever-increasing proportion of institutional revenues, it may be in our self-interest to subject institutional advancement to a similar level of scrutiny. While there are massive bodies of literature and research on the core academic and administrative functions of higher education organizations,

there is no comparable scholarly exploration of the work of university relations.

The functions of development, alumni, public relations, and like departments are often forgotten in university organizations. Detached from key academic activities, they are not readily visible and do not seem to have daily impact on faculty and students. Then comes the moment someone needs to endow a chair, build a building, publicize an important award, or cover a budget cut. The president, provost, dean, or faculty member needs and wants those units to operate quickly and responsively at the highest level of competency and cost-effectiveness. But what do we really know about the effectiveness of institutional advancement units, and are any changes or innovations needed to ensure success in the next century?

Although fund raising, image development, and alumni behaviors have been the sporadic subjects of some dissertations or occasional studies, and various centers or associations have collected statistics and other descriptive data about institutional advancement operations, serious research has been random and diffuse at best. Much has been written about how to do the work of institutional advancement. Little qualitative and quantitative research has been done to develop the conceptual bases and theoretical perspectives needed to critically review the performance of advancement units or develop new methods and strategies for effectiveness. A first and helpful step could be to coalesce existing research into an accessible and coherent body of work that can guide future studies.

An important research issue for urban and metropolitan institutions involves the relationship of institutional mission and community context to strategies for institutional advancement. Do traditional strategies work in large metropolitan regions, or must we use different methods? If so, why and what would those be like?

The articles in this issue could be thought of as a set of institutional case studies that explore the fundraising experiences of metropolitan institutions. Charles Ruch, president of Boise State University, has done an excellent job of building a team of authors who have critically considered their own institutional efforts and shared some lessons learned. Within these articles are the kernels of important research questions that deserve thoughtful exploration if we are to continue to improve the outcomes of our institutional advancement programs.

In this issue of *Metropolitan Universities* you also will find the announcement of the 1997-98 research grant competition funded by the Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities. I hope that these articles on fund raising will inspire proposals to conduct research on questions regarding institutional advancement activities. Now, get out there and raise some money!