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*Most metropolitan colleges have a symbiotic relationship with the community and a mission that typically includes serving the community. This study identifies the commonalities and differences among faculty, students, and community members in defining the university's purposes and mission. While there were many areas of agreement among the three groups, where differences occurred the community tended to play a pivotal role, siding with faculty on some issues and with students on others, but never introducing issues that neither faculty nor students felt were important.*

## **Exploring the Community College Function in a Metropolitan University**

The mission of metropolitan universities is broad, complicated, and, at times, contradictory. These institutions both draw from and give to the surrounding community. The needs of the metropolitan university for student internship experiences, for highly trained and knowledgeable part-time instructors, and for additional cultural experiences are met by the community. In return, communities benefit from the university's presence. However, an urban community has large and diverse needs that often are not readily met by a single institution even though the university has the mission to serve a community.

In addition, the concept of the "community college mission" is one that defies universal agreement on its meaning. It is agreed, however, that the college mission derives from the community and should be designed to meet community needs. In Idaho, it is also agreed that community colleges should offer lower division preparation for four-year programs, career preparation and retraining, precollegiate education that includes GED, adult basic education, and remedial courses, personal enrichment, and links to outside resources. Yet an institution that offers baccalaureate and graduate-level degrees and programs, where excellence in teaching is valued but research is also an imperative, encounters problems with faculty focus, especially as additional graduate programs are added. Community

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needs must continually be redefined in a rapidly changing urban environment. The problem of assessing and meeting the needs of the community is compounded for the metropolitan university when there is no local alternative institution.

This is the issue facing Boise State University, a metropolitan university with 15,000 students, almost 500 full-time faculty, and programs that vary from vocational/technical certification to a doctorate in education. Located in a population area of over 372,000, Boise is the largest metropolitan center between Portland, Oregon, and Salt Lake City, Utah. The area has shown over 20% growth over the past five years and boasts a varied economy based on high technology, agricultural products, tourism, government agencies, and manufacturing. The university has eight colleges, including the College of Applied Technology, in which a number of certificate and associate degree programs are housed. All other local institutions of higher education are privately operated; there is no other public community college.

Because the state as a whole is sparsely populated, the legislature has funded only a few colleges and given each a set of missions that are both unique and diverse. In 1995 the State Board of Education hired the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) to study these roles and missions. One focus of the NCHEMS study was to assess how well the state's higher education system was meeting community needs, especially as they related to technology/engineering and the community college function. Their findings indicated that significant tensions exist within Boise State University, and elsewhere, regarding the community college mission. Specifically, they identified three areas of key concern:

- Faculty priorities and incentives inconsistent with the community college mission
- Large numbers of potentially underserved lower-division students
- Uncertain strategy for meeting the needs of underprepared adults for remedial education and adult basic education.

A small grant from the Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities provided Boise State University with an opportunity to probe some of the underlying assumptions inherent in these concerns. Using the grant funds, the following specific questions were posed: What are the educational expectations of a metropolitan campus as seen by students, faculty, and the community? How are the faculty priorities inconsistent with a community college mission? How unified are the voices of students and the community? What are the key concerns of these constituents?

### **Methodology**

To answer these questions, we undertook surveys of three major constituencies: students, faculty, and community members. Items for the analysis were derived from an earlier version of the ACT College Outcomes Survey. Each set of surveys asked for ratings of importance on 26 outcomes and then for ratings on the extent to which the university should contribute to student growth in 32 areas. Community members were also asked about the importance of various degree programs (e.g., graduate, baccalaureate, vocational/technical) when budget cuts must be made and the extent to which they support various activities covered under the community college mission.

The student respondents were enrolled in introductory psychology or in various courses in the College of Applied Technology. Faculty were randomly sampled from within each of the colleges. Community respondents were obtained from a random sample of names in the telephone directory in a two-county area where the university had a strong presence. About 65% of the faculty and 35% of the community returned the survey. The student sample consisted of everyone who attended class on the day the survey was given. A total of 536 students, 121 faculty, and 211 community members completed the survey.

To ensure we had a good understanding of community responses, we also held a focus group in each county to discuss community college issues and perceptions further. Respondents who had indicated on the survey that they were interested in participating in a group discussion about Boise State University, its image, and its educational mission were contacted and asked to attend one of the focus groups, although about forty had initially indicated that they were interested, only nine ultimately participated.

## Findings

### *Student, Faculty and Community Expectations of College Outcomes*

There was general agreement among students, faculty, and community members on what the most important outcomes of college were. Where disagreements arose, they occurred mainly between students and faculty. The community responses spanned a middle ground, supporting students on some specialized skills acquisitions and faculty on some other broader skills that students rated less important.

The most important college outcome priorities among students, faculty, and community members are listed in Table 1. There was general goal consensus among students, faculty, and community members in six of the ten areas: acquiring knowledge and skills in their area of specialization, learning to think and reason, improving writing skills, improving reading comprehension skills, improving the ability to apply new information, and developing problem solving skills. There was a consensus between students and the community in areas focused on job skills and career development, including acquiring knowledge and skills needed for a career and improving speaking skills. Faculty and the community agreed on goals related to skills important to success, including listening to and understanding what others want, and learning to set goals and follow through to completion.

There were also areas that only students or only faculty thought were important. The top ten goals for students were concentrated in two areas: intellectual development and skills acquisition. Concerns that weighed heavily on students but were not seen as critical to faculty or community members included learning about career options and using computers effectively. Only faculty felt that improving students' ability to make better decisions and drawing conclusions from various types of data were critical outcomes of a college degree. Both of these outcomes focus on intellectual development. Students may assume they can accomplish these without assistance, perhaps believing that their decisions and conclusions do not need questioning.

Table 1  
Ten Most Important College Outcomes<sup>1</sup> for Students, Faculty, and Community Members

Rank	Students	% <sup>2</sup>	Faculty	%	Community	%
1	Specialized knowledge and skills	96	Learning to think and reason	95	Specialized knowledge and skills	97
2	Career knowledge and skills	92	Specialized knowledge and skills	93	Career knowledge and skills	90
3	Learning to think and reason	84	Developing problem solving skills	89	Reading comprehension skills	86
4	Improving writing skills	80	Improving writing skills	84	Learning to think and reason	86
5	Reading comprehension skills	80	Improving decision making	84	Developing problem solving skills	86
6	Learning about career options	79	Applying new information	79	Improving writing skills	83
7	Using computers effectively	78	Listening to and understanding others	78	Listening to and understanding others	86
8	Applying new information	78	Reading comprehension skills	78	Applying new information	80
9	Improving speaking skills	78	Drawing conclusions from data	78	Setting goals and following through	77
10	Developing problem solving skills	77	Setting goals and following through	74	Improving speaking skills	77

<sup>1</sup> Respondents were asked to "indicate how important it is for students to attain each outcome." Possible responses included "of great importance," "of some importance," and "of little or no importance."

<sup>2</sup> Percentage of respondents who indicated the outcome was of "great importance."

Table 2  
Ten Top Areas<sup>1</sup> for University Contributions to Student Growth for Students, Faculty, and Community Members

Rank	Students	% <sup>2</sup>	Faculty	%	Community	%
1	Academic competence	60	Increased intellectual curiosity	87	Academic competence	78
2	Increased intellectual curiosity	50	Academic competence	83	Increased intellectual curiosity	69
3	Ability to evaluate information	39	Ability to evaluate information	81	Ability to evaluate information	63
4	Developed leadership skills	39	Lifelong commitment to learning	73	Lifelong commitment to learning	56
5	Lifelong commitment to learning	39	Consideration of opposing points of view	62	Developed leadership skills	46
6	Management of finances	36	Greater insight into human nature	50	Management of finances	43
7	Responsibility for own behavior	40	Responsibility for own behavior	47	Responsibility for own behavior	51
8	Recognition of citizenship	34	Increased political and social awareness	44	Consideration of opposing points of view	40
9	Fair dealing with others	33	Increased awareness of external events	41	Greater insight into human nature	44
10	Effective team or group member	32	Interaction with culturally diverse	39	Recognition of meaning of citizenship	43

<sup>1</sup> Respondents were asked to “indicate the extent to which the university should contribute to student growth in each area.”

Possible responses included “should contribute a great deal,” “should contribute a moderate (average) amount,” and “should contribute little.”

<sup>2</sup> Indicates the percentage of respondents who indicated the university “should contribute a great deal.”

We wanted to know, too, if students were a unified group who agreed on the most important outcomes or if they differed depending upon the degree sought. Results showed that whatever their educational goal, students agreed on the importance of the top three outcomes—acquiring knowledge and skills in their areas of expertise and for a career, and learning to think and reason. Departures in perceived importance occurred mainly in the acquisition of academic skills of writing, reading, speaking) and in the use of the computer. Those seeking vocational/technical degrees were much less interested in attaining these outcomes than other students. Thus, those who sought short-term degrees may have been focused on the attainment of skills they could use on the job and saw reading, writing, and speaking as “too academic” and unrelated to their immediate interests.

### ***Areas in which the University Should Contribute to Student Growth***

In general, faculty and the community expected the university to contribute a great deal more than students did in the areas of student growth (see Table 2 for percentages). Again, the community served an intermediary role, sometimes agreeing with students and other times with faculty, but never introducing a new area of their own into the top ten.

All three groups had the following five growth areas in their top ten: becoming academically competent, increasing intellectual curiosity, learning to critique and judge information, making a lifelong commitment to learning, and taking responsibility for their own behavior. Students and community members agreed on the importance of the university’s role in developing leadership skills; learning how to manage personal, family, or business finances; and recognizing their rights, responsibilities, and privileges as citizens.

Faculty and community members agreed that becoming more willing to consider opposing points of view and gaining insight into human nature through the study of literature and the humanities were important roles for the university.

Again, faculty and students each had growth areas that they distinctly thought were important. Students were alone in the extent that they thought the university should help them grow in dealing fairly with a wide range of people and becoming effective team or group members. Faculty were alone in their emphases on becoming more aware of political and social issues and of local, regional, and international issues/events; and on interacting well with people from cultures other than their own.

Again, students with different educational goals expected different things from their education. There were statistically significant differences among the groups on the top three areas—increasing intellectual curiosity, becoming academically competent, and learning to critique and judge information—as well as how to manage finances. In the areas of increasing intellectual curiosity and becoming academically competent, those seeking associate, bachelor, or masters degrees expected more from the university than vocational/technical or nondegree seeking students. In the other two areas, nondegree and masters degree students placed less emphasis on learning to critique and judge information and more on learning how to manage personal, family, or business finances than the other groups.

### ***Support for the Community College Function***

Does the community want a community college? Does it prefer it over other possible ways to expend higher education dollars? Results indicated that good general support existed for the community college mission within the community and that, where it did not, lack of information seemed to be the cause more than outright disagreement.

Community members were first asked to rate the importance of Boise State University's degree and certificate offerings to the community when money becomes scarce and cuts must be made. These were not idle questions—Idaho had just rejected an initiative to roll back property taxes and thus severely curtail funds for higher education. The community responded that bachelor's degrees were considered the most important. Second in importance, however, were vocational and technical certificates, indicating strong support for the community college function. However, associate's degrees that were primarily academic in nature were fourth on the list following graduate programs, probably because of the lack of immediate job applicability.

Community members were also asked other questions about their support for the community college mission. Results indicated there was strong support for the community college function and vocational/technical learning, with well over 80% agreeing these activities were important. There was less support for adult basic education, GED instruction, and continuing education activities. However, about one-third of respondents were neutral on these issues, indicating a lack of information rather than disagreement with the concept. Less than half thought BSU was spread too thin because of the variety of programs offered. Again, however, the size of the neutral group (38%) indicated that more information might well change perceptions.

To better understand community perceptions and support, findings were supplemented with focus group interviews. The interviews revealed a softness and ambivalence that helped explain the percentage of neutral responses. One concern was about including "academic" courses in vocational/technical programs. This was illustrated by comments such as the following:

We seem to [think] that the guy that's going into the trades is going to go in and become a welder and for the next twenty years he is going to run a welding torch, not true....The average life of a journeyman electrician or in the tools is about 5 to 7 years and if they're good, they are going to become contractors, they are going to become bureaucrats....all kinds of things...I think people going into those trades need the option of the well-rounded introduction to all these facets of education. I just think it makes them a better prospect for growth and advancement and everything else.

I taught a course of intro to psychology....One person wanted a degree in welding...and he simply could not (at least in my opinion I assume he was working as hard as he said he was,) he simply could not pass that intro to psychology course at that same level that people going into a four-year degree was. I don't know the justification but

it doesn't seem like he should necessarily have to pass an intro to psych course to be a welder. It just didn't make any sense to me and it was really frustrating to him cause it was the second time he had tried it, so part of me agrees, they can function still under BSU but when you try to mix them and we are going to provide you with academic education for this vo-tech degree I'm not sure that works.

The second area was concern about how perceptions of the university and its reputation in the community would be affected by more focus on the community college mission. One person spoke for several when he said:

...there may be an impression that as we expand our horizons to meet the community college function it may be seen as a step backward to the junior college.

Another felt that:

It (meeting community college needs) could be done without really stepping backwards as long as you are not dummifying down the courses you know to fit this community college function, but I do believe that perception is a lot of it.

Though most expressed initial confusion over how a community college was different or, for some, how BSU was much different from a community college, most expressed support for the general concept. One respondent noted:

BSU is in kind of a unique position because without the junior college offering it puts the town at a disadvantage.

Another argued for further merging of missions, saying:

...there isn't enough interaction between vo-tech and the academic life...I think that that's kind of a shame that there isn't some interaction so that they could duck-tail a little bit more and provide even more to the community.

## Conclusions

The contemporary metropolitan campus has a symbiotic relationship with the community. The idea of a "community college mission" for a metropolitan university includes a wide range of expectations. With this research, we attempted to identify the commonalities and the differences that exist among three key stake holders in defining the university's purposes and mission.

Our findings illustrate there are many consistencies among faculty, students, and community members in their ratings of the importance of college outcomes. The con-

sistencies concentrate in areas related to academic skills and the development of intellectual abilities such as learning to think and reason. Faculty, however, do not rate career-focused objectives and job skills development as highly as do students and community members.

Students—whatever their degree goal—also agreed with each other on the importance of acquiring knowledge and skills and to learn to think and reason. They disagreed mainly on the improvement of academic skills—writing, reading, speaking—with other students pursuing vocational/technical degrees least inclined to see these outcomes as important. There is a certain irony to this finding since remediation of academic skills is as closely aligned to the community college function as vocational/technical courses. Some of this ambiguity was noted in community focus group responses as well.

There was also a general consensus about the academic contributions that the university should make to student growth. The major disjunction between faculty on one hand and students and community on the other was in the university's part in developing areas not traditionally seen as academic—leadership skills, managing finances, becoming a good citizen. Again, there were differences among students depending upon educational goal. Perhaps most interesting was the finding that vocational/technical students were far less interested in learning to manage finances than other groups, and nondegree seeking students were the most interested—both groups seen as fitting into the community college mission.

Results also indicated that support was generally strong for the community college function, though it probably could be strengthened with more information about what it included and what alternatives are available. Four-year degree programs were supported most strongly, followed by vocational/technical programs. Although the community focus group members tended to see community college courses (and for some, its students) as less academically rigorous, most seemed to think that the benefits of inclusion outweighed any negatives.

Taken as a whole, these findings indicate that the typical functions of a community college—especially short-term vocational/technical programs—are valued by the community. With additional information, the community support might well grow, broadening the support base for the university. Community respondents also showed themselves as broad-minded in the activities and outcomes the university should pursue, siding both with faculty on some matters and with students on others. Thus, the idea of the community as an educational partner definitely received support from this research.

## *Is your institution a metropolitan university?*

If your university serves an urban/metropolitan region and subscribes to the principles outlined in the Declaration of Metropolitan Universities printed elsewhere in this issue, your administration should seriously consider joining the Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities.

Historically, most universities have been associated with cities, but the relationship between "the town and the gown" has often been distant or abrasive. Today the metropolitan university cultivates a close relationship with the urban center and its suburbs, often serving as a catalyst for change and source of enlightened discussion. Leaders in government and business agree that education is the key to prosperity, and that metropolitan universities will be on the cutting edge of education not only for younger students, but also for those who must continually re-educate themselves to meet the challenges of the future.

The Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities brings together institutions who share experiences and expertise to speak with a common voice on important social issues. A shared sense of mission is the driving force behind Coalition membership. However, the Coalition also offers a number of tangible benefits: ten free subscriptions to *Metropolitan Universities*, additional copies at special rates to distribute to boards and trustees, a newsletter on government and funding issues, a clearinghouse of innovative projects, reduced rates at Coalition conventions. . . .

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