

The Great Cities Institute has been successfully established as a high-visibility urban policy research center that has at times been drawn into controversial issues. University leadership must be willing to defend academic freedom vigorously. But that freedom cannot be used as an excuse for just any type of pronouncement by faculty, and faculty and administrators must take certain precautions to ensure quality control. These measures will help provide a productive environment for the engaged institution.

The Great Cities Institute: Dilemmas of Implementing the Urban Land Grant Mission

The following incidents are based on actual situations; details have been changed to protect the innocent—as well as the guilty.

- A center director is accused by a city commissioner of a faculty that is not academic and objective because most of their research is done on behalf of community organizations. The director tries to explain the concept of advocacy planning and research, but also suggests that if the commissioner would ask for specific research and come up with the funding, faculty would probably do work for the city as well. Subsequently, the commissioner indeed contracts with the faculty for an evaluation study.
- A faculty member conducts an analysis of the economic effects of physical development and the displacement effects of a planned university expansion, and provides testimony to the city council on the matter. An administrator of the university accuses him of being one-sided in his analysis, ignoring certain costs and benefits. Privately, the faculty member concedes the point, arguing that one can never be sure of all costs and benefits, and that the university has plenty of high-priced talent on its side, but that the neighborhood opponents do not.
- A research center conducts a study showing that residents displaced from public housing that is being torn down as part of a city plan often are unable to find private sector housing, even with gov-

ernment help. Furthermore, the study points out that developers stand to make millions on the redevelopment of the public housing. After a major article in the local newspaper on the study, the university's chancellor is told through his public affairs staff that for the time being he is not welcome at City Hall. A university administrator calls the dean overseeing the center and asks to see copies of the study. The dean is later told that the administrator thinks the study is "no good"; the dean defends the methodology and conclusions. No further action is taken.

- A faculty member is asked by a political candidate to provide an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the city's industrial policy. The faculty member refuses to provide any information because he fears retribution from City Hall and his research center is waiting for a city contract.

Ethical, political, and academic dilemmas are nothing new for researchers; surely Galileo would have dismissed the ones above as puny compared with his choice between recanting his theory or life imprisonment. In less extreme ways, universities are facing such issues more often as they increasingly pursue engagement with current societal issues as their proper role. University-based policy centers are at the leading edge of this movement, and thus most likely to experience these kinds of problems. This article discusses the work of the Great Cities Institute at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC), with a particular emphasis on the constraints and dilemmas of conducting policy work in a contentious environment. While we have no doubt about the importance and value of this new wave of interest in applied policy work by universities, institutions should not engage in it naively and need to be aware of the full range of advantages and disadvantages that may be generated.

The Urban Land-Grant Mission at UIC

The Great Cities Institute was established in 1995 as part of UIC's broader Great Cities program. "Great Cities" refers to the university's commitment to use its teaching, research, and service programs to improve the quality of life in metropolitan Chicago. In this way, the university will become a model for a land-grant university in an urban setting.

The Great Cities concept combines two parts of the institution's history. Started as an undergraduate commuter campus after the Second World War, the new Chicago branch of the University of Illinois was always expected to have an "urban mission," although few could agree on what this meant. Rapid growth during the 1960s and 1970s and the 1983 merger between the new campus and the older University of Illinois Medical Center created a Carnegie Class I Research Institution, renamed the University of Illinois at Chicago. Maintaining the barely earned Class I designation was a central institutional goal during the 1980s and led to the downgrading of the urban mission as a goal—indeed, the two were frequently seen as opposites. Appointed in 1991, Chancellor James Stukel soon realized that the new social and political environment of post-Cold War America required a more distinct institutional mission than simply replicating the original downstate land-grant campus at Urbana-Champaign, and therefore developed the Great Cities concept, which was planned through a broad-

based participatory process and formally announced in December, 1993, with the chancellor, Chicago's mayor, the chairman of the Chicago Housing Authority, and the president of the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges as keynote speakers.

The Great Cities concept rests on the ideas of a close relationship between research and the issues faced by people and institutions in the metropolitan area, a metropolitan area poses questions and issues that actually represent opportunities for first-class research, and interaction with external audiences is an essential component in conducting such research.

A critical aspect of the Great Cities program is that it includes many other services that were already in existence. The Great Cities concept had the important effect of legitimizing and validating many research, teaching, and outreach projects that involved some form of interaction with other agencies in the metropolitan area, and it helped these programs to grow. In addition, several new projects were started to provide a focus and showcase for the Great Cities concept and to model what Great Cities at its best represented. The new programs included the College of Urban Planning and Public Affairs, bringing together several existing and new units; the Great Cities Faculty Seed Fund, which provides incentive funding for faculty to engage in urban-oriented applied research or outreach; the UIC Neighborhoods Initiative, a comprehensive neighborhood revitalization partnership between UIC and adjacent neighborhoods; the Health Policy Research Centers, which bring together the university's health and health care policy expertise; the City Design Center, a collaboration between architects and urban planners; and the Great Cities Institute.

The Great Cities Institute

The Great Cities Institute is a multidisciplinary urban research unit that supports and encourages a comprehensive range of research and outreach projects. As the preceding brief history shows, the Institute was from its very beginning in 1995 meant to be a highly visible unit, dealing with current issues of importance. Thus, it is not surprising that from time to time some level of controversy might arise. In order to understand the context, some background information on the programs, structure, and funding of the Institute is necessary.

The Institute operates through several main programs: the Great Cities Scholars; the Great Cities Faculty Seed Fund; and the support of other affiliated faculty and fellows.

Great Cities Scholars. Each year, the Institute selects 10-12 UIC faculty as Great Cities Scholars. Selected through a Request for Proposals and a peer review process, Scholars are bought out of their courses for a year and given office space at the Institute and funding for a graduate research assistant. They are expected to work on their own project (which should be interdisciplinary, urban-oriented, and have an applied, service, or policy component), and participate in biweekly lunches with other Scholars, seminars, and other special events.

Great Cities Faculty Seed Fund. The Great Cities Faculty Seed Fund provides approximately 10 awards per year, up to \$7,500, to UIC faculty. Like the Scholars' projects, Seed Fund projects should be interdisciplinary, urban-oriented, have an ap-

plied component, and, in addition, are expected to have the potential to generate external support in the future.

Affiliated faculty and fellows. Although not anticipated initially, the Great Cities Institute quickly became a home for many other faculty and staff who sought to run grants through the Institute or to spend a sabbatical there. In addition, people from outside UIC (unaffiliated researchers, former politicians, public figures) have become associated with the Institute, bringing their own resources and seeking the institutional legitimacy of a university research center. In the process, they have greatly enhanced the visibility of the Institute, and its connectedness with the civic, political, and business life of the Chicago metropolitan area.

The Institute is housed in the College of Urban Planning and Public Affairs, where, through 1998, the College's dean also served as Institute director. A new director, reporting to the dean, was named in January, 1999. The tone and emphasis of the Institute has been consciously interdisciplinary and university-wide, as reflected in the broad participation from different colleges.

The Institute is supported by a recurring state budget of close to \$1 million. During the 1998-1999 fiscal year, grant expenditures were just over \$3.5 million, with major grants from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the National Science Foundation, the National Institutes of Health, and the MacArthur Foundation.

Success, Visibility, and Controversy

At the broadest level, the Great Cities Institute is the key component of UIC's Great Cities program. Indeed, many people often do not distinguish clearly between the two. Thus, the visibility that UIC has gained for its Great Cities approach is both due to, and redounds favorably upon, the Great Cities Institute. The Great Cities program has been featured at conferences of the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges and many other organizations, in articles in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Metropolitan Universities* journal, *Renaissance Magazine*, and local newspapers, and has been presented as a model for other universities.

In a short time, the Institute has gained a strong reputation on and off campus, as reflected in the large number of applications for its Seed Fund and its Scholars programs, its ability to attract external funding, and the many requests for collaboration and cosponsorship that it receives. The latter have been particularly important, as significant opportunities have come the Institute's way because of its visibility alone. For instance, the Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant program chose the Institute as its partner for the establishment of a Lake Michigan Coastal Economic Development Project; a former member of the U.S. House of Representatives, a former Illinois State Senator, and a former Commissioner of the Chicago Department of the Environment have been appointed to the Institute; and formal joint educational and research projects have been created with the major coalition of neighborhood housing development organizations in Chicago and the major drug treatment program for the Cook County criminal justice system. Other successful projects include research on smoking cessation by one of the Scholars, which led to a \$15 million grant to UIC from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation for a national research project on tobacco and alcohol abuse; and research on school-to-work programs, which led to major funding by foundations, including the

National Science Foundation, to create model programs in Chicago and Detroit that involved high schools, community colleges, and four-year institutions.

Other successful enterprises have been more controversial. The Institute has been the lead organizer of the National Empowerment Zone Action Research Project, which is the major nongovernmental national evaluation of the federal Empowerment Zone program. The Empowerment Zone project has been the subject of major controversy between city government and community organizations. The Great Cities Institute Scholar who was the lead researcher on the project, and whose findings were critical of city government, became persona non grata at City Hall. When a different research contract, involving other faculty, was being discussed with city staff, they expressed doubts about the university's commitment to objectivity.

In another project, the Institute won a competitive contract for a needs assessment of public housing residents. After a year's delay, the contract still was not signed and the Institute director wrote a letter of complaint to the Housing Authority, a letter that happened to coincide with a newspaper article attacking the agency. The Housing Authority's chairman concluded, wrongly, that the Institute was part of a campaign to push him out and canceled the contract.

The potential for conflict is not limited to the world outside the university. For example, Institute Scholars just completed a *White Paper on Evaluating and Rewarding Public Service*. The paper was prepared at the request of the Provost and the Vice Chancellor for Research and will be used to start a campus-wide discussion about the topic, which is likely to make the Institute a flash point for further controversy.

The likelihood of controversy is increased by the conscious "let a thousand flowers bloom" policy that the Institute has followed during its early years. The Institute is dominated by a very entrepreneurial spirit, opening its doors to meetings of many organizations; agreeing to cosponsor a wide range of conferences and events; providing office space to short and long-term visitors; and welcoming anyone with good ideas for external grant support. This entrepreneurial approach is facilitated by the decision-making structure, which maximizes decentralized initiative. The selection of Scholars and Seed Fund recipients is done by peer review, but all other projects are the result of initiatives from staff, Scholars, or requests from outside the Institute, and require only the approval of the Institute's director to move forward or be allocated resources.

The Responsibilities of the University

The Great Cities Institute's first few years have been very successful because it was the right idea, established with appropriate resources, in an environment that presents no end of salient opportunities for active engagement. The most challenging issues have been raised precisely by this engagement, as well as by the high profile nature of the Institute and the Great Cities concept generally. External organizations and individuals regularly use the university's public statements about its urban commitment to demand that certain types of assistance be given—ranging from admission of particular students, to support for events, to conducting particular research. At other times, actions by the university are attacked as being contrary to somebody's interpretation of what the Great Cities commitment means. Research by faculty at times displeases specific politicians, community interests, or, for that matter, the university administration.

The examples provided above and in the introduction to this article cover a range of situations that the Great Cities Institute, and other similar centers at UIC and elsewhere, have encountered. These examples give rise to a number of questions:

1. What responsibility do administrators have for quality control on the work of faculty or academic staff?
2. Does any one university, or college, or center, or faculty member, have a responsibility to conduct studies on different sides of an issue; or, over time, to conduct studies that come from opposing points of view?
3. At what point does writing op-ed pieces, making presentations, or other public activities based on research go beyond a proper academic role? In professions where the academic role and the citizen role are close together (such as in public policy and planning), what responsibility does an academic have to be objective when making public statements?
4. In arguing for positions based on a faculty member's research, how much obligation does s/he have to present the weaknesses and alternative points of view?
5. Can an administrator reasonably ask a faculty member to change, add, or delete parts of a study in order to be more evenhanded?
6. Is it irresponsible of a faculty member not to study and publish on aspects of the behavior or plans of his own institution that are related to the faculty member's field?
7. How common are situations where a faculty member's research is challenged because of the political pressure it brings on the institution? Are there differences between institutions? Are these situations likely to have a chilling effect on engaging in controversial research?
8. Are there, or should there be, guidelines for faculty and administrators on these issues?

Faculty enjoy a number of long-held and strongly protected prerogatives under the general principle of academic freedom. These, of course, include the privilege to pursue a line of inquiry and to draw conclusions from it, and the privilege to report these conclusions publicly. These privileges are enjoyed unfettered by either administrative direction or a sense of allegiance to institutional priorities. When faculty utterances are critical of university goals or when they are critical of views held by others important to the university (legislators, mayors, trustees), university presidents and chancellors often feel the squeeze.

An Example: University Expansion and Relations with Neighbors

One specific example deals with UIC's expansion plans. UIC is located on the near west side of Chicago, and at present the university has 25,000 students and a billion dollar budget. It is largely a commuter campus, with only about 10 percent of

the student body housed in residence halls. Only about 200 of its 12,000 employees live in the immediate neighborhood.

UIC is expanding its campus to the south in an effort to build a more residential community for students, faculty, and staff. The campus has acquired about 58 mostly vacant acres and, in partnership with a master developer team, will build 850 for-sale residential units, residence halls, a commercial strip for retail stores, and some needed university facilities. The project will be financed through the proceeds from the land sales to the developers and the anticipated approval of a tax increment financing designation for the area. This is a nine-year, \$500 million enterprise.

As one might expect, public interest in the project has been keen since it was first announced. Developers competed to be UIC's partners. Elected officials from neighboring communities wanted control of the project. Neighborhood organizations worried about the effect on surrounding areas. Enabling legislation had to be passed by the State General Assembly, which gave the university special powers so that it could be an attractive partner in a public-private venture. The Chicago City Council must yet approve the establishment of the tax-increment financing district, the master plan, and enter into a redevelopment agreement with the University. The development area included the historic Maxwell Street Market, which had to be moved to a site several blocks away. There is no housing in the area, and most of the remaining district buildings are in such a state of disrepair that they will need to be razed in order to build residence halls and retail facilities. Most existing businesses and vendors will be relocated at university expense.

The first visible activities for the expansion started in 1993, around the same time that the Great Cities program was announced. While this timing was coincidental, both opponents and proponents have frequently linked the two together, with claims ranging from "Great Cities is only a smoke screen for the removal of the Maxwell Street Market," on the one hand, to "Building a new city neighborhood is a beautiful example of the Great Cities approach" on the other.

Given the complex nature of the project, it is not surprising that some members of the UIC faculty also found fault with what the university was doing. Further, given the independence of the faculty, it is not surprising that faultfinding moved to action, demonstrated by the writing of reports and opinion pieces, and in the mobilizing of students and community groups to protest.

Therein lies the squeeze. Compelling institutional priorities, sanctioned by the Board of Trustees, the General Assembly, and City Hall, were vocally opposed by some faculty members of the same institution. Many outside observers, particularly those from the political and corporate world, wondered how such behavior could be tolerated within the university. Why were faculty critics not controlled?

What then, are the appropriate roles for both the chancellor and the faculty when such dilemmas are encountered? University chancellors must continue to defend explicitly the right of faculty to do critical analyses and to take consequent positions. Academic freedom is the cornerstone of American higher education and must be vigorously protected. Further, chancellors must educate trustees, elected officials, and the corporate community regarding the culture and traditions of the university.

Faculty, however, have a responsibility to conduct unbiased investigations and to report the results in a fair, objective manner. Ideology has no place in their public utterances, nor do emotional calls for action. Given that critical work may endanger funding, both public and private, faculty must ensure that their work is responsible.

A further dilemma in this case was created for faculty who worked with neighborhood organizations in the surrounding area. The *UIC Neighborhoods Initiative* is one of the major projects of the Great Cities Institute. It consists of several dozen active research and service projects involving UIC faculty, students, and staff with community agencies, schools, businesses, and health and social service organizations in two neighborhoods adjacent to the campus. The program is guided by a Steering Committee, with representatives from the faculty and the community, and staffed by two coordinators. A dozen projects are funded by a Joint Community Development grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development; others are funded from a wide range of federal, state, local, and institutional sources obtained by individual faculty and other participating centers.

Regardless of faculty's individual views on the university's expansion plans, community groups tended to hold them responsible for institutional plans or actions. At times it was galling, for the administration as well as for faculty, to have their good work with schools, health centers, and neighborhood development organizations ignored or dismissed in broadside attacks on the university. The *UIC Neighborhoods Initiative* established successful partnership efforts between university researchers and community organizations. As part of this, funds are being provided for new commercial development in one neighborhood, and the establishment of a UIC-operated health clinic in the other, and for extensive housing renovation in both areas. In addition, a new social service agency has been established, as has an arts education program; a school playground has been renovated; several million dollars of city infrastructure funds have been redirected to these neighborhoods; hundreds of neighborhood residents have participated in a variety of leadership development and entrepreneurship training programs; and fifty organizations have been provided with Internet access through the university. In spite of all this, some organizations and residents attacked the university's expansion plans and argued that UIC had never done anything for the neighborhood.

However, the most sophisticated of these organizations knew how to strike a balance, and they were able to separate disagreement on one issue from productive collaboration on another. Indeed, the community members on the Steering Committee of the UIC Neighborhoods Initiative explicitly recommended that the Initiative not take a stance on the university's expansion, in order to protect the partnership.

Responsible Engagement

Balance is the key to successful engagement in high visibility community activities. Academic freedom can be protected if work is done in a responsible way, with responsible partners. This requires frequent and clear communication about the institutional constraints that each party faces. Neither institutional priorities nor faculty privileges need be harmed, and the interests of external partners can also be protected.

For instance, if there had been more frequent communication between the Housing Authority and the university, the incident described previously could easily have been avoided.

In addition, a number of other specific measures can be taken. At a minimum, research reports need to carry the standard disclaimer that they represent the opinions of the authors, and not those of the research center, the institution, or the funding agency. Even prior to publication in academic journals, policy research should be subject to serious review by both academic peers and informed policy experts. Furthermore, administrators of policy research units do have an ultimate responsibility for the quality of the work carried out and published at their unit. This also gives them the right, and the duty, to request changes to draft reports if justified on academic grounds. Also, faculty should make clear when they are speaking based on their research and are exercising their academic role and freedom, and when they are expressing views as ordinary citizens, based on their ideology, personal preferences, or general knowledge, rather than on academic research.

In regard to the question of what topics research centers should be addressing, and from what perspectives, it would seem that policy research centers reasonably can be held accountable within the limits of their mission. A center established to conduct research and technical assistance for community-based organizations cannot be expected to do work for private businesses or local government. However, publicly-funded centers such as the Great Cities Institute, with a broad mandate to study urban issues, need to have a portfolio approach. If too much of their work is oriented toward one problem, or one set of issues, they can be called to task by members of the public who feel neglected. Indeed, farm workers in California successfully argued that too much of the agricultural extension funds were used for research benefiting corporate farm owners, rather than farm workers.

Finally, does operating in a contentious environment have a potentially chilling effect on researchers? If the precautions described above are in place, administrators should be able to defend research unequivocally. Even then, not all times and places will be equally hospitable to critical research. In this regard, the late twentieth century United States may not be the best place ever, but it is very far from being the worst. Universities have never been truly disengaged from the world's realities, and can be even less so now. One of those realities is that if one pursues policy changes, one will be confronted by opposition and power; this may also mean the occasional loss of a contract. To insist on utter and total protection from outside pressures at all times is otherworldly and, ultimately, arrogant. To be an engaged institution, one has to accept the terms of engagement, and these include some level of constraint and accountability. As long as the tenets of academic research are adhered to, these terms should not prove too burdensome.

Conclusion

The Great Cities Institute has been successfully established as a high-visibility urban policy research center. The main factor in its success has been its status as a key component of an institution-wide priority, the Great Cities program, which included the provision of a reasonable level of resources and strong support from the upper

administration for collaborative efforts with faculty and units from across campus. In addition, the Institute's leadership had high visibility on campus and throughout the metropolitan area, facilitating the creation of partnerships and joint efforts. Furthermore, a very loosely structured, highly entrepreneurial atmosphere has proved congenial to attracting high-energy, productive individuals who helped the Institute to grow rapidly.

Because of its involvement in urban development and policy issues, the Institute has at times been drawn, directly or indirectly, into controversial issues. However, similar types of issues are likely to be encountered in some form by any policy research center. University leadership must be willing to speak out vigorously to both explain and defend the concept of academic freedom. At the same time, academic freedom cannot be used as an excuse for just any type of pronouncement by faculty. Faculty and administrators must take certain steps and precautions to ensure quality control. If properly administered, these measures will help provide a productive environment for the engaged institution. However, some level of conflict and tension will inevitably accompany efforts to be relevant to society's pressing issues.