

*From the  
Editor's Desk*

*Barbara A. Holland*

The 1999 conference of the Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities was a great success, and many thanks should go to President Charles Ruch and his team at Boise State University. The sessions were of high quality, everything was well-organized, and the Rocky Mountain weather was beautiful. Because the meeting was a recognition of the tenth anniversary of the Coalition's formation, there was considerable reflection on the roots of the organization, and speculation on its future. In general, it seems to be growing in its influence and meeting some of its early goals.

The Coalition began, in part, because some urban and metropolitan presidents became increasingly aware of the things their campuses had in common, and of shared frustrations. The mission and characteristics of their institutions were not well understood, and any system for ranking or describing universities and colleges was based on the traits of highly traditional, residential colleges serving full-time 18-21 year-old students. Systems such as Carnegie's classification scheme did not include measures for the significant applied research and service activities of urban and metropolitan universities. These presidents found themselves gathering on an ad hoc basis at the national meetings of major higher education associations, and eventually decided to organize their own affiliate group.

The founding members shaped the Coalition as an association that would focus on exchange and communications to share information about our institutions for the purposes of enhancing internal planning and external understanding. Thus, the group initiated the journal you hold in your hand as its first major endeavor. The journal continues to serve as a unique venue for exploring the characteristics and experiences of urban and metropolitan universities. They also sponsored occasional national conferences, and engaged most recently in funding direct research on our institutions. But its primary goal continues to be the enhancement of internal and external understanding of the metropolitan mission.

There is evidence we are making advances in external understanding. Some may see irony in the fact that in the last decade, higher education has focused on a series of issues that in fact make urban and metropolitan universities the exemplars for the future of higher education at large. The nation's student body is now more diverse, more students are working and going to school part-time, and the era of lifelong learning is upon us, as more people engage in nondegree learning activities on and off campus. At the same time, more and more institutions understand that they must become engaged in scholarship related to regional and community issues; that they must apply research and learning toward the improvement of the economy and the quality of life for citizens of their region. As the nation's student body changes and the pressure for institutions to support public engagement grows, we—urban and metropolitan universities—are the institutions that have the most experience with these challenges and can lead the way.

As illustration of our growing leadership role in higher education change discussions, consider that the themes chosen for this journal are presented in the context of urban and metropolitan universities, but they are in fact relevant to almost all postsecondary institutions. K-16 partnerships, service learning, diversity, learning communities, faculty roles and rewards, and so on, are all important topics of conversation across higher education. Important changes are under way at many institutions, and the advanced experiences of metropolitan institutions are of great interest to the rest of higher education. What a change from past decades when few higher education leaders and associations even knew what it meant to be called an urban or metropolitan university!

One of the Coalition's recent projects to enhance the understanding of our institutions is the development of a "portrait" of the metropolitan university. Workshops on the portrait project were held at the 1998 conference in San Antonio and the recent 1999 conference in Boise. The workshops assembled a corps of institutional researchers and administrators to explore the descriptive elements of the metropolitan university that most exemplify our distinctive nature. Our challenge is that though we may have features in common, we are all also very different. Our goal is to focus on the most distinctive characteristics that describe the basic type, while leaving room for diversity. For example, there is tremendous variety among the nation's research universities, but everyone has a common basic understanding of the general features of a typical research university. The portrait project hopes to do the same for the metropolitan university.

Not surprisingly, the project is focusing on two features in particular that we think of as the defining features of the metropolitan mission: the characteristics of our students, and the role of public engagement and outreach. The Executive Committee has approved funds to support data exchanges among member institutions and some first-phase research on key indicators to measure these characteristics. Led by Victor Borden of Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis, the project team is also seeking foundation support for future research.

This project is taking on greater importance and urgency in the face of important recent developments regarding the Carnegie classification system. I participated in a meeting last summer in which the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching discussed its intentions to reform the classification in two stages. The first stage was recently announced and involves several changes that will simplify the current categories and make them more descriptive of degree production. For example, the research and doctoral categories are blended together and simply divided into two tiers according to the number of Ph.D.'s awarded.

The second set of changes will be much more complex and will require several years of research. By 2004-2005, additional scales may be proposed to describe institutional missions in greater detail by using indicators of activities such as teaching and outreach. The goal is a multidimensional classification system that describes what institutions "do" with their resources, whom they serve, and how faculty effort is used, for example. Higher education is changing, and it is increasingly important that we understand the differences among institutional missions.

One of many ongoing challenges Carnegie faces is to keep the system more descriptive than evaluative. The current system was never meant to be evaluative, although many institutions use a move up the classifications as evidence of quality, achievement, and prestige. Such claims are, of course, flimsy, given that the current system reports nothing but levels of activity. For example, it is used to infer prestige and quality in research activity, when in fact it merely reports the level of research funding and says absolutely nothing about quality or impact of research outcomes. There are some who believe the classification system should openly adopt an evaluative role, but at the moment Carnegie's interests remain primarily descriptive.

The Carnegie Foundation is aware of the Coalition's portrait project and includes it in their thinking and planning for coming changes to the classification system. Our work may provide useful information regarding the description and measurement of certain activities such as the impact of so-called nontraditional students on the teaching mission, or on ways to measure levels of outreach or public engagement activities.

The articles gathered together for this issue of the journal focus on the theme of "assessment and planning." These activities are increasingly important to the understanding of our institutional missions and our performance. The articles, and the work of the portrait project, highlight the importance of increasing our institutional investments in our internal research capacity. Our tradition has been to give few resources to institutional research units, and the result is that we have more data collection than data-analysis capability. Our future will include many more pressures to measure our work and our performance, and we must enhance our capacity to conduct qualitative and quantitative research on our institutions. I predict that you will be hearing much more discussion in the coming months about the need to expand institutional research functions to meet the growing demand for assessment and planning activities. In the meantime, the authors in this issue give you some excellent examples for strategies to enhance your own assessment and planning efforts.

## Call for Contributions

*Metropolitan Universities* continues to welcome the submission of unsolicited manuscripts on topics pertinent to our eponymous institutions. We seek contributions that analyze and discuss pertinent policy issues, innovative programs or projects, new organizational and procedural approaches, pedagogic developments, and other matters of importance to the mission of metropolitan universities.

Articles of approximately 3,500 words should be intellectually rigorous but need not be cast in the traditional scholarly format nor based on original research. They should be *useful* to their audience, providing better understanding as well as guidance for action. Descriptions of interesting innovations should point out the implications for other institutions and the pitfalls to be avoided. Discussions of broad issues should cite examples and suggest specific steps to be taken. We also welcome manuscripts that, in a reasoned and rigorous fashion, are *provocative*, challenging readers to re-examine traditional definitions, concepts, policies, and procedures.

We would also welcome letters to the editor, as well as opinion pieces for our forum pages. Individuals interested in contributing an article pertaining to the thematic portion of a forthcoming issue, or writing on any of the many other possible subjects, are encouraged to send a brief outline to either the appropriate guest editor (addresses available from the executive editor) or to the executive editor. Letters and opinion pieces should be sent directly to the latter:

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