

Leading Higher Education into the New Millennium: Reflections of a Conference Planner

Though the Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities' Sixth Annual Conference in Boise, Idaho marked the organization's tenth anniversary, the occasion warrants reflection for other reasons, not the least of which is, "Why Boise?" "Is Boise even an airline destination?" Don't laugh—one East Coast gentleman asked me that over the phone. I gently replied that when his flight arrived in Portland, the Connestoga Express Wagon would be there to carry him to Idaho's capitol in just two or three days, depending on weather conditions. Honestly, Boise *is* a unique place to hold a metropolitan university conference. With a population of just over 400,000 in the Boise Metropolitan Area, it is understandable that visitors from Chicago, Washington, D.C., Baltimore, and the like might be skeptical about the location. Boise State University does, however, share the issues common among metropolitan universities nationwide and was a charter member of the Coalition.

Idaho is host to many unflattering stereotypes. What, for example, would a state whose population is ninety percent Caucasian have to say about diversity? I am not certain I want to speculate about what conference attendees may have expected to find upon their arrival in Boise, but I hope they were pleasantly surprised! Boise is smaller than the areas from which most participants hail and has a noticeable lack of high-rise office and apartment buildings. But the city is home to spectacular scenery, beautiful weather, and a relaxed friendly atmosphere and way of life. Many conference participants took advantage of the Greenbelt, which was accessible from the hotel grounds and runs for nearly 30 miles along the Boise River, explored the downtown area, and toured the Boise State University campus. A few even joined me for a post-conference hike in the mountains bordering the edge of town.

For the tenth anniversary and Sixth Annual Conference of the Coalition, we chose as our overarching themes issues that have always been very important in the development of the metropolitan university mission and that will play increasingly important roles as time goes on. These are the themes of technology, partnerships, and diversity.

Technology

Technology changes faster than we can learn how to use it. For many of us, typing articles on old, rickety Smith-Coronas with whiteout on standby was much more comfortable than even attempting the old blue screen, command-oriented WordPerfect. We embraced technophobia. Until three years ago, many had never used Microsoft Word; Excel came even later. Only recently did our computers become more than glorified typewriters, and many of us have since discovered that computers can actually aid many of our favorite activities. I, for example, can download USGS maps into a GPS and even print them from home before hiking (no more hunting through REI's disorderly map collection for unwrinkled copies), and can research the perfect bivy sack for

cold-weather hiking; I can maintain contact with friends traveling in Europe and can research diving spots for my next Caribbean vacation.

At the Conference's first plenary session, Phil Burgess, president of the Center for the New West in Denver, Colorado, discussed the importance of technology not only for business and the world in general, but for higher education in particular. In this era of doing things faster and better, he reminds us to focus on doing things better. Technology is evolving at an almost incomprehensible rate—before most people have fully developed an understanding of a new technology, it evolves into something else. For people who pride themselves on understanding the tools they use daily, as many academics do, this fact is daunting. Burgess remarked that the direction a new technology takes often has very little to do with what started it, and although the circumstances that catalyze a movement may not be around at the movement's end, it is imperative to become involved at the beginning so that, as things progress, we are not left behind.

Technology has changed and continues to change the world around us and our own daily activities—our communication, purchasing habits, scheduling practices, and even the way we make travel arrangements. Who can say where it will go next? Burgess maintains that “it is impossible to exaggerate the importance of the Internet. It is the most important thing to happen in our lives in the last five hundred years.” The Internet truly has opened a new stratum of possibilities: E-mail, E-commerce, E*Trade. Many universities offer online registration, online applications, online grade access, and online courses and discussion groups. It took only four years for the Internet (World Wide Web) to reach 50 million people. It took radio 38 years, personal computers 18 years, and television 13 years to reach the same number of people.

How does this affect higher education and the students it serves? If the Internet is, as Burgess suggests, the most important advance since Christopher Columbus' return from the New World, and if it triggers a similar “liberating effect” on the current population—especially the younger generations—as those Burgess attributes to the effects of Columbus' actions in his time, the impact could be enormous. He points out that of every figure viewed by modern society as a major contributor to the High Renaissance era, only one person was older than twenty-five when Columbus returned from the New World—Leonardo da Vinci. The others, including Magellan, Vasco de Gama, Sir Thomas More, Ignatius, Erasmus, Machiavelli, and Copernicus were twenty-five years of age or younger. If the Internet is in the same league as Columbus' return to Spain, imagine the inspiration we will soon see from the younger generations—the generations it is our responsibility to educate!

The second major theme of the Sixth Annual Conference was that of partnerships between universities and outside entities. As Charles Ruch, President of Boise State University (BSU), stated, “Metropolitan universities take their soul and sustenance from the community they live in.” Our second plenary session featured a panel of urban university presidents and urban city mayors, including President Charles Ruch; Charles Hathaway, Chancellor of the University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR); Brent Coles, Mayor of the City of Boise; and Jeff Griffith, Mayor of the City of Reno, Nevada. As one panelist noted, universities have the power to be one of a city's most influential contributors; they also have the power to hinder a city's improvement of

quality of life, and the group discussed the roles universities play in developing successful partnerships between cities and universities.

Jeff Griffith detailed the University of Nevada–Reno’s (UNR) “landlocked” position—a common problem on urban university campuses, and explained how UNR and the City of Reno are working together to revitalize the city’s deteriorating downtown core. In a move that is mutually beneficial to both UNR and Reno, the University is relocating its planetarium to a downtown facility. They also plan to create a downtown display for UNR’s extensive natural history collection, which is currently without a home.

Charles Hathaway reviewed a number of UALR’s university-community partnerships, including a survey of the Little Rock School District, led by Joel Anderson, and a controversial tax initiative to raise funds for a new sports arena and convention center on the UALR campus. As important as Hathaway’s examples of successful partnerships are, he shared some words of wisdom about university-city partnerships:

1. Don’t expect to receive all the money the community sources say they will provide.
2. Be willing to reject some partnerships for your acceptances to have meaning.
3. Be willing to “rephrase the question” and actively engage people in the issues.
4. Address the small questions for the long term.
5. When the going gets tough, do not assume the city will be there to support you, because their priorities may lie elsewhere. Rather than be upset if this occurs, be prepared to deal with it.

Having survived numerous controversial initiatives, UALR remains very beloved in its community, and—aware that universities cannot facilitate successful community improvement alone!—continues to emphasize the necessity of initiating partnerships.

Charles Ruch suggested that a community’s quality of life has five components, each corresponding to a university college: good educational facilities (College of Education), a strong business and economic sector (College of Business and Economics), state-of-the-art health care facilities (College of Health Sciences), a growing interest in, appreciation of, and understanding of technology’s role in society (College of Engineering and Technology), and high-quality cultural and recreational opportunities (College of Arts and Sciences/Humanities). Listing the characteristics as he did clearly shows the variety of directions universities and cities can take in working together to improve a community’s way of life. A vital first step is to make it known that the university is actively interested in improving the community in which it lives. Boise State University has worked steadfastly to publicize the fact that the University is a place where all points of view are not only welcomed, but also encouraged and respected. It is a place where opposing factions may meet and discuss issues. Although the university may offer to gather information and take part in conversations, it will not give recommendations on a particular course of action—that is for the city to decide. Acting as a forum for the open exchange of ideas is one of BSU’s most powerful contributions to the Treasure Valley.

The dialogue between university presidents and city mayors is important and complex. It is imperative to understand that the two will not always agree, nor should they. Cities have one set of concerns while the university has another, and although they may overlap, there are myriad differences. Mutual respect for and responsiveness to these differences is essential; they are, after all, what make a city's heart the most interesting place to be—"it's where the action is" (Ruch).

Brent Coles also elaborated on the issue of partnership using a local example. Recently, after much debate, Boise State University established a College of Engineering. Although Idaho has gained more than 2,000 jobs in the high-tech industry in the prior year, ranking the state fourth in high-tech job growth between 1990 and 1997, with sixty-six percent growth in the high-tech job sector (*Idaho Statesman*, 6/3/99), not a single member of the Boise Metro Chamber of Commerce supported Ruch's initial proposal for a College of Engineering at the university. There was not a single supporter, that is, until Mayor Coles voiced his own support for the new college, clearly illustrating the importance of having a strong president/mayor relationship.

Partnerships

To further address the theme of partnerships, three concurrent conference sessions—one in the advancement track and two in the academic affairs track—discussed partnerships between universities and community entities, and between universities and school districts. Three articles based on conference presentations on this theme are included in this edition of *Metropolitan Universities*. John Welty, President of California State University–Fresno (CSUF) has prepared an article about the partnership between CSUF and the Fresno Unified School District. This partnership, aligning faculty from all disciplines with administrators from both the university and the school district, works together to identify and address issues important to both constituencies and to strengthen existing partnerships as well as to build new ones.

Like John Welty, Joel Anderson, Provost of the University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR), led a bold university-school district initiative. His article discusses UALR's year-long study of the Little Rock School District, exploring the study's risk management efforts, the procedures for choosing an effective task force, and the conclusions that were reached. Anderson also describes the complex issues unique to both the Little Rock School District and the City of Little Rock itself that stem, in part, from the initial desegregation efforts of 1957.

Lauri Alpern, associate director of the University of Illinois at Chicago's (UIC) Great Cities Institute; Jerome Burstein of San Jose State University (SJSU); Jane Karadbil from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD); and Joni Lee, associate vice chancellor for university advancement at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR), explain the key concepts and goals of HUD's Community Outreach Partnership Centers (COPC) program. Using examples from UIC's Neighborhood Initiative, SJSU's neighborhood outreach, and UALR's Oak Forest Initiative, they discuss ways in which the grantees can engage in successful, innovative outreach programs and act as models of institutionalized university engagement. They also explore the impact of COPC-sponsored programs on the neighborhoods they serve, as well as on the faculty and students who participate in COPC activities.

Diversity

To initiate the conference's discussion of diversity, we took a distinctively local approach. With the largest Basque community outside of Europe, Boise has a unique cultural offering not to be found anywhere else in the country. Local attorney and son of a Basque immigrant, Roy Eiguren, was well-qualified to begin our Basque dinner program by sharing his experiences and those of his father, who arrived in Boise with only pennies in his pocket and without specific direction or a home. Eiguren shared a history of Basque culture in general, and its culture in Boise in particular, including his memories of growing up "different" from most of the other local children. Following Mr. Eiguren's presentation, the Oinkari Basque dancers, a group of local high school students of Basque descent, performed folk dances.

R. Eric Landrum, with Ronna Dillinger and Elizabeth Vandernoot, all of Boise State University, continued the conversation on diversity issues on the following day. Landrum and Dillinger devised the Campus Diversity Questionnaire-Revised to assess diversity climates on college and university campuses. In their article, Landrum, Dillinger, and Vandernoot discuss the results of administering this questionnaire to eleven Coalition member institutions, and report on the different attitudes about diversity seen among students of various races, genders, ages, and class standing.

The article by Janna Jones and Robin Jones, both from the University of South Florida, presents an innovative interdisciplinary urban studies course that uses experiential learning to heighten students' critical thinking skills. As they are exposed to multiple perspectives of an issue and immersed in different populations within an urban neighborhood, students begin to understand and appreciate how different factions with opposing agendas can learn to work together to solve urban problems. Another by-product of this course is that students learn to embrace a more complex view of their surroundings and more thoroughly analyze the issues in the own communities.

Other Conference Topics

In a different vein, Nancy Shulock, associate vice president for academic affairs at California State University–Sacramento (CSUS) and Kathi Ketcheson, director of institutional research at Portland State University (PSU), discuss one of the most important issues currently facing metropolitan universities: how to assess and communicate the effectiveness of the often misunderstood metropolitan university mission. This article describes the two very different approaches CSUS and PSU are using to accomplish that goal, both inside and outside the university. They also explore the effect a university's culture has on choosing an assessment program.

M. Ann Abbe, president of Abbe & Associates: Philanthropy Solutions, represents the conference's advancement track presentations. Abbe's article explores the values, trends, and issues of women as important, and often overlooked, philanthropists. Highlighting the changing directions in which women have headed over the course of the twentieth century, including their newfound vistas of wealth, increased opportunities and equality, and increased life expectancy, Abbe emphasizes the importance of cultivating women donors. In addition, Abbe describes how a woman's motivations for giving and the recognition she hopes to receive are often quite different from a man's,

as are generational differences that influence how, when, why, and for what projects a woman will donate. She also provides helpful suggestions for universities seeking to create new women's philanthropy programs.

Other conference sessions included discussions of capital campaigns at metropolitan universities, building successful enrollment management programs, interdisciplinary studies, the freshman year experience and service learning, and how to identify an institution's best advocates.

The Future of Metropolitan Universities and the Coalition

The Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities was formed, in part, because the metropolitan university mission is not well understood. Our institutions do not conform to the performance and quality indicators traditionally used to assess universities. Ten years ago when the Coalition was beginning to operate and define itself, small groups of presidents and chancellors met every 18 months or so to discuss what they were doing to advance the understanding of and respect for metropolitan universities. These early members expressed, in the Coalition's by-laws, that the organization's objectives included the promotion of important contributions, goals, and ideals that are inherent parts of metropolitan university missions and distinguish them from other institutions of higher education. The Coalition aims to educate, and also to disseminate and distribute information and procedures that will help urban and metropolitan universities best use their resources and more productively shape their policies and actions.

From a conference planner's perspective, some of the most important discoveries about what a group has accomplished and what challenges remain are learned not from the conference sessions themselves, but from the attendees. In the ten years since the Coalition's inception, many changes have taken place. The Coalition has grown from a handful of charter institutions to a group of nearly sixty member institutions. Now that more people are becoming aware of and receptive to the idea of a metropolitan university it may be necessary to once again reflect on the movement's goals. Although ten years have passed, and perhaps *because* ten years have passed, some remain unsure of the Coalition's objectives. A small group of individuals at the conference remarked that though they believe they have a solid understanding of the issues facing metropolitan institutions, they do not have a clear vision of how the Coalition plans to advance its cause. These individuals understand what makes us different from more traditional research institutions and small liberal arts colleges, but believe that the Coalition lacks a clearly-defined set of goals and objectives to help accomplish its short and long-term plans. Its tenth year provides the perfect opportunity to reiterate the Coalition's concrete short and long-term goals to both veteran and newly involved institutions and individuals.

The Coalition provides access to fellow metropolitan institutions and their resources. As people working to further the metropolitan university mission continue to expand into more university disciplines, successful communication becomes increasingly important. Conferences no longer consist primarily of a small group of chief executive officers brainstorming and discussing the issues at hand; they now include a broad range of advancement, academic affairs, student affairs, and institutional research per-

sonnel. The leadership of a university's chief executive officer is imperative, but the success of the metropolitan university movement depends upon keeping all interested and dedicated parties across the disciplines not only well-versed in the movement's issues, but in keeping them in contact with one another to stimulate collaboration.

Perhaps the most important possibility to emerge from the sixth annual conference was the commencement of new alliances. Boise Mayor Brent Coles has proposed collaboration between the Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan University member institution presidents and the U.S. Conference of Mayors to pinpoint priority issues for university-city partnerships. This partnership is currently being pursued. The Coalition's annual conference is one of the group's best forums for displaying individual and institutional works that promote the metropolitan university mission. It is also an excellent means of introducing key players from many institutions to one another, thereby fostering new opportunities for collaboration.

Early in our nation's history, people moved west in search of new opportunities. Even today, much of the nation's cutting-edge technology comes from the western region. This past October, the Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities ventured west to mark the end of the Coalition's first decade and the commencement of its next. Although Boise is still a small city, it has many of the same problems facing larger ones. After all, what is a small, growing city but one that will soon be a large one? Like other cities, Boise has diversity issues with which it continues to struggle. As the fifth fastest growing cyberstate in the nation, with much of its growth occurring in and around the city, Boise is well acquainted with the ever-increasing role of technology in daily life and commerce. This autumn's trek west brought to the Coalition and its members new opportunities: the opportunity for small and large cities to learn from one another; the opportunity to reconsider the roles of technology, partnership, and diversity at metropolitan universities; and the opportunity to revitalize, reiterate, and reflect on the Coalition's past, present, and future as it heads into the new millennium.

Metropolitan Universities

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