

Branch Campuses as The New Metropolitan Universities

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Branch campuses are not a new idea. Jefferson originally conceived of multiple college campuses located such that all Virginians would be within a day's ride of a higher education establishment. The commitment to such wide accessibility, however, is a more recent phenomenon in higher education, and many branch campuses now exist throughout the United States.

Branch campuses vary considerably and many exhibit traits of the so-called "metropolitan" mission. They include research universities and community colleges. Some are freestanding institutions within a statewide system, while others are extensions of individual institutions. Some are residential, some are commuter campuses, and some are accessed electronically. Some are limited to upper division and graduate level programs, while others include programs at all levels. Some are focused largely on continuing education while others concentrate on degree programs. Some are located in close proximity to the originating campus (George Mason) while others are separated by hundreds of miles (University of Alaska Anchorage). Some were created by multiple institutions folding existing programs under a common shared umbrella (Montana State University, University of Alaska) and some were created as totally new endeavors (California State University Channel Islands). Both public and private institutions have spawned branch campuses.

Despite this variability, there are some common elements. First, most branch campuses have a primary goal of providing access to students who would not otherwise be able to participate in higher education. These students, often referred to as place-bound, have difficulty accessing higher education that is offered on traditional, residential, or distant campuses. These students' inability to relocate in order to pursue an education may be an economic issue. When the cost of higher education includes relocation or commuting costs as well as tuition and room and board, it exceeds the reach of many who may be unwilling or unable to amass the accompanying debt. Students who are returning to higher education, either to complete a previously interrupted academic career or to attain an additional degree, often come with educational impediments such as mortgages, car payments, jobs, spouses, and children. As a result, institutions and state legislators have located branch campuses in the new "urban villages" that develop in previously rural or ex-urban areas around major urban centers.

Second, decision makers have become aware that institutions of higher education serve purposes other than providing local degree programs; branch campuses also impact urban villages economically. Place-bound students often remain in the local vicinity and become an important economic and cultural force. Institutions also have economic impacts apart from the degree programs that they offer. Imbedded in these programs may be research and development efforts that help to stimulate or assist local development activities. They are also important social and cultural resources that enhance overall quality of life for the community.

Third, these new metropolitan universities are centers of academic innovation. They offer a place to practice pedagogical crafts in new ways. Community members become important sources of information and instruction for the academic programs. Private and public endeavors become important, real life laboratories for students. Students themselves, because of their multiple roles, bring information, ideas, and issues into the classroom that can markedly enrich the academic experience. These campuses become ideal places to establish the engaged institutions described by the Kellogg Commission on the Future of the State and Land-Grant University (NASULGC 1999).

These campuses also face significant challenges. Providing library services in a distributed environment is aided by the new electronic media, but doing so at an adequate level continues to be a challenge. Student life programming requires very different strategies when the students have several other roles in addition to that of student. Managing relationships with the local community presents new administrative challenges when the demarcations between “town and gown” are blurred. The relationships between the newer campuses and the parent institution are complex, dynamic, and labor-intensive. Marketing or imaging efforts of the newer campuses can become problematic when the students or potential students appreciate the campus primarily for its convenience, while the institution sees itself as much more than an academic service station. The authors in this issue of *Metropolitan Universities* journal explore some of these challenges faced by new metropolitan universities.

Stocum sets the stage by providing a history of developments in American higher education. In addition, he argues passionately for a blended mission of scholarship, teaching, and community engagement for these new metropolitan universities. He strongly challenges the elitist division of resources that has favored the “flagship” universities. He does so not only on the grounds of fairness, but also pragmatism. He suggests that if higher education is to continue bringing the economic, cultural, and social benefits to our society, then the traits of newer, more responsive missions of higher education should be incorporated into the universities of the future. Stocum argues the urban universities of today are models for the universities of the future.

The most frequent topics of discussion among branch campus administrators relate to the interaction among the various campuses, particularly the relationship of the newer campuses to the ones from which they originated. Dengerink suggests that the administrative and organizational structure of multi-campus universities should be dictated by the mission of the whole university, which must be crafted to integrate the separate missions of the component campuses. He suggests several hypotheses about organizational conditions that must be met for multi-campus universities to be successful.

Gray and Chamberlain address a common policy issue facing public universities in urban settings. Urban and metropolitan universities frequently find themselves sharing territory with other institutions that have similar or related roles. Not surprisingly, policy makers frequently expect or even dictate collaboration among these institutions. The authors explain why such forced collaborations often fail. While they are generally pessimistic about collaboration in urban markets, they also suggest conditions that will favor successful collaborations.

Penney describes a collaborative effort from the Boston area that appears to have met those conditions and experienced success. This voluntary collaboration among established institutions may provide a road map for those institutions that find themselves sharing educational service areas.

The traditions of American higher education are intricately bound with faculty and their culture. Thus, an important question relates to the characteristics of the faculty that serve these new institutions. Nickerson and Schaefer begin to address this question. The authors find that the nature of the faculty varies with the campus type. Also, even though faculty at branch campuses experience a sense of isolation from their colleagues on the home campus, Nickerson and Schaefer observe that these faculty are disinclined to change their circumstances.

A major logistical concern of new campuses is the provision of library and technology resources. Wykoff raises the interesting possibility of combining these into a single campus resource. She discusses the synergy of these university services and outlines practical issues that mitigate against or support the integration of library and technology services. She also suggests that these new campuses may have the opportunity to create new structures, services, and solutions that would be more difficult to implement at larger, more established campuses.

Carwein, Boyle, Idstrom, and Wark remind us that, as locally-oriented branch campuses, the people we serve go beyond the actual students on our campuses. Community partners provide important logistical, strategic, and financial support. The authors chronicle a remarkably successful program of community relations that can be extremely helpful to developing and mature metropolitan universities.

The individual articles in this issue of the journal are intended to provide discussion of some of the key questions that arise for the new metropolitan universities. Those of us who have been immersed in these institutions realize there is no single solution to any of the concerns. There is no formula or cookbook. Rather, a forum for exploration helps to highlight alternatives and creative solutions both for these new institutions, and for more established institutions as well. This edition of Metropolitan Universities offers such a forum.