

From the Editor

Barbara A. Holland

A primary purpose of the Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities is to build a broad understanding across higher education about the “urban or metropolitan mission” as a distinctive type of institution. The universities that identify with this mission seek to be recognized as interpreting the classic features of a research, doctoral, or comprehensive university within the context of the intense shaping influences of their highly-urbanized regions.

In other words, urban and metropolitan universities have all the characteristics of any university, but the intentional and unintentional impacts of a large metropolitan location means that those standard characteristics often develop unique dimensions and expressions that are the hallmark of a self-identified urban or metropolitan institution. Over the years, many urban and metropolitan institutions have said, in various similar expressions: “We are not just in this city, we are ‘of the city.’”

We tend to serve more part-time and stop/start students who balance work and family responsibilities with study, and may be the first in their family to go to college. Most of these students come from and will remain in the region around the institution after graduation. Such a student body has inevitable impacts on other features of the institution. Learning environments are often flexible and emphasize convenience and efficiency as well as quality. The institution must give focused attention to strategies that promote retention and graduation. Campus life and community present special challenges when few students live on campus and most are commuters.

Faculty roles are similar to those of any university, but the priority given to teaching, research, or service is spread more evenly across all three roles, and faculty can face diverse demands and competing expectations. The underfunded nature of these institutions also means that urban and metropolitan faculty must balance these multiple priorities with a heavy courseload and fewer graduate assistants. Many urban and metropolitan universities rely heavily on part-time and adjunct faculty; however, their urban location can turn the reliance on outside faculty to a strength when they are drawn from top practitioners and leaders from community, government and business.

The role of campus leaders focuses on the usual array of budget, personnel, program, and institutional advancement issues, but these activities are strongly influenced by external conditions and demands of the metropolitan region such as the state of the economy, the mix of business and industry, the nature of the work force, the demographics of the city, the priorities of civic, government and business leaders, and so on. Urban and metropolitan executives are running a large enterprise that is seen by others as a key economic force in the region, and campus leaders are often expected to participate in planning efforts and programs addressing regional development issues.

All universities must attend to issues of town-gown relationships but urban and metropolitan institutions can find themselves caught up in a multi-dimensional web of complex neighborhood and regional relationships in which they have strong interests but modest influence. Over time, scholarly agendas and academic programs become a reflection of the relationship between the campus and the city as the market demands of students and employers influence curricula and research.

Analysis does reveal a clear pattern of general institutional traits and attitudes that, at least in part, illustrate what it means to be an urban or metropolitan university. These are presented in Table 1, which is based on my own years of research on institutions that self-identify as urban or metropolitan. Taken individually, some of these traits could be found at institutions that do not identify with this mission; however, in combination, these are the standard hallmarks of a university likely to see itself as urban or metropolitan.

Taken in combination, these characteristics distinguish university life and work on an urban or metropolitan campus from others in more rural settings. This is not to say that urban and metropolitan institutions are all alike. One of the challenges in promoting a wider understanding regarding the urban or metropolitan mission, is that each university is a unique expression of its history, policy environment, funding patterns, and metropolitan context. For example, in this journal and the Coalition we use both “urban” and “metropolitan” intentionally because some institutions perceive a strong resonance to one term over the other. This distinction usually can be explained by local and regional influences that shape the implications or interpretations of the urban or metropolitan label. Analysis of institutional characteristics does not find a strong empirical difference between institutions that choose one term over another; the choice seems more based on history, politics, and personal preference.

In sum, our urban and metropolitan institutions are alike in many ways, but also different in their interpretation, and both conditions are the result of our interaction with our environments and our students. Imagine the difficult challenges associated with trying to articulate a common set of formats, definitions and reporting standards for urban institutions, and then working to formally document measures and indicators of institutional fit with those standards and features. This was the challenge taken up by the institutions participating in the Urban Universities Portfolio Project. In this issue of *Metropolitan Universities* journal, authors from the project reflect on their individual and collective experiences in a project that used a portfolio approach to describe institutional characteristics, programs, and outcomes. As they worked together and separately to explore the key organizational elements included in the portfolios, the project teams developed a keen awareness of the fundamental ways urban institutions see themselves in common, and sensitivity to the importance of documenting the differences. I thank the guest editor, Susan Kahn, and her colleagues for candidly sharing the rewarding and the perplexing aspects of the project. For those approaching institutional self-studies in the near future, this will be productive reading. These and other institutions and accrediting groups will continue to assess the utility of the

portfolio format for institutional analysis and reporting, and the Urban Universities Portfolio Project team deserves our appreciation for their pioneer work in exploring this model.

Table 1. Characteristics of the Metropolitan or Urban Mission
 “We are not just in the city, we are ‘of the city.’”

Factors	Characteristics
Organizational Leadership; Policies	Leadership articulates metropolitan mission consistently to internal and external constituencies; intentional policies, rewards, and structures reflect mission
External Context, Relationships, and Networks	<p>Campus plans respond to issues of region</p> <p>Students primarily from SMSA and alumni remain in area</p> <p>Links with other institutions and collaborations address urban needs through research, teaching, and service</p> <p>Community characteristics influence academic agenda</p>
Infrastructure	<p>Intentional approach to partnerships and purposeful community involvement in campus life</p> <p>Organizational structure supports complex external relationships</p>
Faculty Roles and Rewards	<p>Definition of scholarship supports interactive relationship with community across all faculty roles</p> <p>Credible and accepted system for evaluation and reward includes recognition of community-based work</p> <p>Goals for academic quality consider impact on region</p>

Factors	Characteristics
Faculty Composition	Community experts involved in academic agenda; criteria promote the appointment of faculty with nontraditional academic backgrounds; at least a third of the faculty are engaged in community service
Disciplinary Approaches	Multidisciplinary teams reflect complex nature of urban issues and educational needs; teams evolve with external changes; involve students and community members in planning and implementation
Educational Approaches	Learning experience is designed to serve students with highly diverse traits, goals and patterns of attendance; opportunities provided for community service; urban issues incorporated into curriculum

Barbara A. Holland, "From Murky to Meaningful," in R.G. Bringle, R. Games, and E.A. Mallory, eds., *Colleges and Universities as Citizens* (Boston: Allen and Bacon, 1999): 48-73.