

From the Editor

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The ideals and concepts of the metropolitan mission and civic engagement are going global. In countries all around the world, more and more universities are exploring the link between their academic mission and the success of the cities and regions they serve. Conferences, funded projects and cutting-edge research on topics such as the civic mission of higher education, the scholarship of engagement, community-university partnerships, and link between learning and the development of civic responsibility in students are occurring in places such as South Africa, Eastern Europe, the United Kingdom, Norway, Germany, Thailand, Australia, Canada, and Brazil, among others. The international discussion is expanding rapidly, and provides many opportunities for comparative analysis and shared learning about the links between higher education and societal needs and expectations.

The founding members of the Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities, the affiliate group supporting this journal, were wise in conceiving of the Coalition as an international organization from the beginning. In all of the countries mentioned above, most of the institutional leaders committed to connecting the academy to public purposes are the universities located in urban and metropolitan centers, institutions that tend to see their mission as having immediate relevance to the development of their city, region and nation, as opposed to a mission of more detached observation and pure intellectual reflection. The most graphic example of this phenomenon is the emerging conception of “The New Generation Universities,” a group of universities from nine nations, convened by OECD and the Association of Commonwealth Universities, are meeting together to explore their shared vision of an active role for higher education in economic and community development and thereby, their distinctive visions of academic roles and culture. (See the paper by Janice Reid and Rhonda Hawkins for a detailed discussion of the New Generation Universities.) The description of these universities is remarkably similar to the Coalition’s conception of the metropolitan university mission: institutions founded mostly in the latter half of the last Century, with strong local support for their creation; a history of chronic under-funding of the financial resource base; a student body drawn primarily from the metropolitan area, many who are first-generation learners; a focus on research and academic programs that are especially reflective of and responsive to the developmental needs and opportunities of the region; and a broad vision of the scholarly roles of faculty and a balanced commitment to excellence in teaching, research and community engagement.

This issue of *Metropolitan Universities* reports on the Australian perspective on the metropolitan mission and the role of universities in community and economic development. Most of the papers included here were originally presented at a national conference in September 2002, hosted by the University of Western Sydney, a long-time active member of the Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities. “The

University & Community Engagement Forum” attracted more than 130 participants representing 28 universities across Australia. I had the privilege of participating in the Forum, and observed the striking similarities between US conceptions of the metropolitan university and the Australian articulation of institutional motivations for strengthening the connection between the intellectual work of the academy and the needs of the community. Not surprisingly, a cluster of universities lingered after the Forum and organized the Australian Engaged Universities Interest Group (AEUIG) to provide a venue for continuing their discussions on engaged scholarship and partnerships. The AEUIG participants found the Coalition’s conception of the metropolitan mission so relevant to their interests that they have posted the “Declaration of Metropolitan Universities” on their web site (<http://www.uws.edu.au/about/adminorg/devint/ord/aeuig>). Fifteen Australian universities are participating in the group and represent, as the Coalition does, a diverse array of institutional types that have in common view that community engagement is a core element of their university’s mission.

The National Forum at UWS happened to coincide with a nation-wide review of higher education across Australia, conducted by the federal agency that funds the higher education sector, the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST). This process provided context for the Forum’s agenda by articulating national priorities and challenges regarding the future role of higher education, including the sector’s role in regards to issues of economic and community development. I was struck by how similar the rhetoric and concerns about higher education were to the discussion of higher education issues in the U.S. Although the academic structure and culture of Australian universities draws heavily on the British model of university organization and curricular forms, the political and financial dynamics are quite like those found in the U.S., especially regarding the extremely competitive tensions between the so-called “sandstone universities” (the older, larger universities with a research-intensive culture) and all the other institutional types.

Also remarkable was the highly participatory process used in the national review. The Review began with the release of an overview paper prepared by DEST entitled “Higher Education at the Crossroads” in April 2002, which set out some of the characteristics of the higher education sector, and the challenges it faces. The call for responses to the issues and questions raised in the paper inspired 355 submissions from a variety of stakeholders. Based on these, a series of issue papers were produced to explore some issues in greater depth. Again, you will recognize the parallels to many concerns regarding higher education priorities in your own institutional context:

- Striving for quality: Learning, teaching and scholarship
- Setting firm foundations: Financing Australian higher education
- Varieties of excellence: Diversity, specialization and regional engagement
- Achieving equitable and appropriate outcomes: Indigenous Australians in higher education
- Meeting the challenges: The governance and management of universities

- Varieties of learning: The interface between higher education and vocational education and training

Again, the opportunity for input drew nearly 400 responses from a variety of stakeholders including higher education institutions, business groups, student organizations, unions and individuals. The final outcome of more than a year's discussion and interaction was the passage of a reform package that lays the foundation for a ten-year vision for Australian higher education, with approximately \$1.5 billion additional Commonwealth funding being invested in the sector over four years. You will find these papers fascinating and extremely relevant to your own policy and financial issues (<http://www.backingaustraliasfuture.gov.au/review.htm>).

In the review process, the concepts of community and regional engagement were raised many times. However, as is still the case here in the U.S., these ideas remain controversial both inside and outside the academy. As the articles in this issue illustrate, the relationship between societal expectations for higher education, and the academic traditions and priorities of higher education are not always in tune with each other. The full recognition of the intellectual value of community engagement and the metropolitan mission around the world will depend on our further work on issues of faculty preparation and socialization, the evaluation and reward of faculty work, the recognition and financial support of diverse institutional types, and attendant changes in systems of ranking and recognition of institutional performance.

Australia's involvement in advancing this agenda of higher education change also includes a prominent role in international research and exploration of the civic mission of universities. In July 2003, the University of Queensland hosted the second International InsideOut Conference on the theme of "Charting Uncertainty: Capital, Community and Citizenship." (<http://www.uq.edu.au/insideout/index.htm>) The three-day program featured nearly 60 papers from scholars and political leaders from many different countries, all addressing issues such as the role of higher education in social transformation, our diverse visions of successful communities and of the dimensions of citizenship, the impacts of mass media and the digital divide on community development, and other related topics. Organized by the UQ Community Service & Research Centre, this was a major international meeting presenting recent scholarship on policy and practice issues related to the engagement role of higher education. The next conference will be in 2005. In part, the idea of this international gathering was inspired by the work of the International Consortium for Higher Education, Civic Responsibility and Democracy, a multi-national project studying the role of the higher education sector as a strategic component of democratic political development. Funded in its first phase by the US National Science Foundation and the Council of Europe, the project began with a study involving the US, South Africa, and forty European nations, and is now expanding to include research in Australia, South Korea and South America. The project seeks to map what universities are doing to contribute to democratic practice and to encourage higher education to incorporate attention to the development of civic responsibility and a commitment to democratic practice in the learning experiences of students.

The University of Western Sydney also continues to provide leadership for the expansion of attention to community engagement across Australia. UWS hosted a second National Forum, also held in July 2003, focused on the theme of “Bringing Knowledge to Life: Learning and Community Engagement” and attracted about 150 representatives from higher education, community and schools to explore the different modes and strategies for community-based learning.

The articles in this issue give you some idea of the historic perspectives on the role of higher education in Australian society, as well as the diverse approaches to implementing community engagement programs and partnerships as told through a number of exemplary projects. To ensure that you have the best opportunity to understand the issues, challenges, and priorities for this work in the Australian context, the articles have not been edited in ways that alter the tone, spellings and grammatical constructs typical of “Australian English.” This is a journal issue written in their own “voice.”

Given the historic vision that the Coalition and this journal should be international in scope, it is exciting to present this first, fully international issue of *Metropolitan Universities*. Since our first international conference last fall in Vancouver, British Columbia, several new international members have joined the Coalition, and more are sure to join soon. As the model of the urban and metropolitan university is articulated around the world, the Coalition will increasingly become an international organization, which will enrich the learning opportunities for all members.

As Executive Editor, I want to acknowledge the considerable contributions of my Australian colleagues who helped collect these papers, hosted the Forums that inspired these works, and welcomed me into their campus communities. Warm thanks to UWS colleagues Jan Temple and her colleagues in the Office of Regional Development; Kevin Sproats, Director of ORD; Jan Reid, Vice Chancellor and President of UWS; and Rhonda Hawkins who has represented UWS at several of the Coalition’s recent conferences. My sincere thanks also go to Bruce Muirhead, Director of the University of Queensland Community Service and Research Centre, and his staff team. It has been an exciting learning experience for me to spend time with all these colleagues and to visit additional universities in Australia that are leading community engagement programs. I also wish to acknowledge the contributions of the authors of the papers, who share with the readers of this journal a commitment to the concepts of the engaged metropolitan university.