

**We regret that Dr. Betty L. Siegel's  
article was inadvertently omitted from  
*Metropolitan Universities Journal*, 15.3,  
on the theme of "First-Year Student  
Experiences." We apologize for the error  
and include Dr. Siegel's article in this issue.**

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# Access and Excellence: Continuing Goals for Metropolitan Universities

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## Abstract

*This article considers the enormous changes in this country's metropolitan universities brought about by expanded access to higher education, and describes the programs and policies that one university—Kennesaw State—has implemented to adjust to these changes. Seeing these trends as an opportunity to redefine our institutional mission and, at the same time, reassert our commitment to academic excellence, Kennesaw State has built upon its model of invitational leadership in order to encourage student success in the classroom and beyond.*

As president of a metropolitan institution that has until recently been exclusively a commuter campus, I often think about how our ideal educational community should look, and I must say that what I see on our campuses is not far removed from that imagined ideal. After all, metropolitan institutions at their best are models of the “public’s college,” to use a phrase from Constantine Curris (2000), president of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities. To be the “public’s college,” one dedicated to the twin goals of access and excellence, is already to have defined certain ethical implications of our work. With expanded access, we signal our strong support for the democratic ideal of equal opportunity. It is a moral stance, as well, that has far-reaching implications for the future of our colleges and universities, for we are working to reflect more accurately the diversity of the larger society. Indeed, we are working to reflect a truly global society.

Yet the reality of university life for many of us is a far cry from the popular images of higher education in our culture. Remember this story line? It is late evening in a small town at the turn of the century. A young man on the brink of his college years has just fallen asleep, and he dreams of the adventures awaiting him. His is a blissful slumber, for he dreams of his college campus, where cool breezes whisper among stately old oak trees. Now a smile plays about the dreamer’s lips, for he has caught a glimpse of himself. He is dressed impeccably in tweed, over which he wears his academic robe, sleeves billowing impressively behind him. His mortarboard is perched rakishly on his cultivated head, and as he strides across the cobblestone courtyard, he smiles the smile of one who is utterly at home.

The dreamer shared many things with his peers. From the cradle, privileged young men were reared in the certain knowledge that they were expected to attend a fine traditional institution. The young student’s dream, which is reflected in Hollywood’s

version of the academic life, is often still the dream that comes to mind when we think about higher education. In those old movies, fresh-faced young men, elite and assured of their station in life, were taught by urbane gentlemen scholars, all of whom looked like Ronald Coleman or Gregory Peck. Faculty, students, and administrators alike shared the same sense of order and values, and everyone, from the groundskeeper to the president, knew what the rules were.

That kind of university life, if it ever existed at all, is gone forever, even from our most prestigious institutions. Not only are we dealing with students very much like those fresh-faced male scholars of yesteryear, but also with fresh-faced female scholars; business men and women seeking career advancement; students of African or Asian or Arab or Hispanic descent seeking equal opportunity; working class mothers returning after years away to complete their undergraduate degrees; grandparents; and other full-time and part-time students outside the bounds of “tradition.” Yet while contemporary students may not ask for ivied walls and tweed-jacketed professors, they do want the same high-quality education their predecessors desired. Our many different kinds of students have many different needs, and they deserve an educational environment committed to accommodating those needs.

Our role as administrators of metropolitan colleges and universities is to deal somehow with the remarkable diversity in our student body and at the same time maintain standards of excellence for our faculty and students alike. In many ways this is the most pressing dilemma we face in the academy today. As I say, there is absolutely no question that we are educating a larger and more diverse population of students through increased access to our schools, especially with the advent of online and distance learning. Here are some remarkable facts about today’s college students in America:

- 80 percent of students are non-traditional;
- only 33 percent attend college full-time;
- 45 percent are over 24 years of age;
- since 1985, the number of women students increased by 23 percent—indeed, women students now outnumber their male peers on our college campuses;
- the percentage of college students who are employed is 75 percent, with 25 percent working full-time jobs; and
- the enrollment of minority students is up over 25 percent and growing.

To honor these changes, we must work harder than ever before to ensure that while we expand access we are also expanding excellence in the education we offer.

I have had the opportunity to hear Patricia Cross, a distinguished spokesperson for the adult learner and professor emeritus in education at the University of California’s Berkeley campus, speak on a number of educational issues, and she often uses the analogy that today’s colleges must build new access ramps to the super highways that form postsecondary education. In the past, when

there was little diversity, most traffic on these highways traveled at the same rate of speed and in the same direction. Now, however, there are many different types of vehicles and drivers. At Kennesaw State University, we have company vans, foreign models, and even classy antiques. The role of our teachers is to serve as “traffic cops” who are asked to meet twenty assorted vehicles going at different speeds and escort them in a convoy through the maze of academic requirements for a particular course or program of study.

The success of our teachers, then, will depend not only on what they know, but even more on the kind of people they are and how effectively they have learned to teach to what Howard Gardner (1993) calls “multiple intelligences.” Gardner’s famous theory posits that most testing in our schools measures only verbal and logical-mathematical intelligences, even though many students have strengths and capabilities that fall outside the range of this limited understanding of cognition. Gardner suggests that teachers take into account other forms of intelligence, including visual/spatial, bodily/kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, naturalist, spiritual, and existential. Only teachers who are willing to meet students where they are academically and developmentally can remain open to so many varied styles of learning. Teachers should be recruited, therefore, who see themselves and others in positive ways and who see their roles as freeing rather than restricting.

We should also encourage our faculty to expand their repertoire as teachers. Clearly, if higher education is to restore the centrality of teaching, faculty must be redirected through our institutional cultures and reward systems to concentrate greater attention and energy on effective teaching. Reorienting faculty toward a global perspective is also imperative. The observation that the world is changing and shrinking faster than anyone could have imagined even a few years ago is now axiomatic. Indeed, worldwide traffic on the Internet doubles every 100 days, and estimates are that by the year 2010, information generally will double every 72 days. “Thinking globally” is no longer a phrase identifying a certain segment of the curriculum—usually geography or history; it is a vital influence on all disciplines. While today’s technology may assist us in educating our students, it is hardly sufficient as the sole pedagogical tool. Rather, we need more than ever to recruit faculty who can give our students a sense of their connectedness that extends far, far beyond the classroom—and with commuter students at larger metropolitan universities, this sense of connection is often essential to ensuring their success. Put differently, we need faculty who can understand fully the profound truth of Martin Luther King’s words in “Letter From Birmingham Jail”: “We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.”

## **An Invitational Model for Education**

These are lessons about higher education that every college and university must sooner or later absorb, especially if we are to unite access and excellence on our campuses. The extraordinary diversity in our societies gives us an unprecedented opportunity for growth not only in size but also in service and stewardship. To facilitate the creation of

an inviting campus environment at Kennesaw State University, we established in the early 1980s a “View of the Future” committee, which we charged to study four questions. First, we asked ourselves just what the mission of a public college should be—and how our college fit into that newly defined mission. We had already grown since our founding in 1963 from a small junior college to a senior regional institution, so clearly our mission had to accommodate the changes brought about by our extraordinary growth. Second, we asked ourselves what we could do as an institution to become more inviting in our teaching; what positive and innovative techniques could we implement to enhance and facilitate student success? Third, we attempted to define the many publics we serve—we asked, “Who are our students and what are their needs?” Finally, we asked ourselves what we could do to create facilitative administration that would encourage an invitational philosophy across the campus.

Most important was this focus on inviting our students to succeed, and soon this philosophy permeated the entire campus. Indeed, taking such an attitude toward students is inextricably linked with our basic assumptions about the role of education in both our professional and personal lives. In his essay “Teaching in the Face of Fear,” master teacher and lecturer Parker Palmer (1997) writes about what is necessary to “improve the quality of . . . teaching” in our nation’s schools:

Good teaching does not come from technique. It comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher. If we want to teach well, we must learn more about the human dimensions of our craft—about the inward sources of our teaching, about the claims it makes on our lives, about our relations with our students, about a teacher’s wounds and powers.

Too focused on the maddening bureaucratic responsibilities of our jobs as administrators or faculty members, we often fail to take the time to reflect on what brought us to the field of education in the first place. No doubt most of us would discover in taking such time that it is precisely the “human dimensions of our craft”—*not* bureaucratic responsibilities—that compelled us to follow our career paths. Parker’s words, especially his notion that teaching is intimately connected to “inward sources” like “identity and integrity,” can inspire us to shift our attention to the more deeply satisfying rewards of our work and our relationships with our students.

One of those rewards is the opportunity to see our students respond to the invitations we send to them. This idea—that students can be summoned cordially to success—is the basis of the Invitational Alliance for Invitational Education, an organization I founded in 1982 with my colleague Dr. William Purkey, a professor in UNC-Greensboro’s Department of Counselor Education. This organization, which has now grown to include over 1,000 members representing 13 countries, is based upon a philosophy of education similar in spirit to Palmer’s work.

Proponents of this theory of practice hold that good teaching is the process of inviting students to see themselves as able, valuable, and responsible, as well as an integral part of a collaborative community of learners. Invitational educators believe that the major

duty of the teacher is to construct an environment that promotes the student's basic tendency to grow beyond his or her present understanding of the world. In other words, each classroom—and, indeed, each college or university—should be so intentionally inviting as to create an environment where each student is cordially summoned to develop intellectually, socially, physically, psychologically, and spiritually. As with Palmer's model, the invitational theory of education is less about technique than it is about the "human dimensions" of education. Taken beyond the classroom to apply to campus life more generally, this invitational model can radically alter a university's culture, bringing its people, places, policies, processes, and programs into alignment for the benefit of its students, in all of their diversity.

## **Programs for Success**

I would like to mention a few of the programs that have best served Kennesaw State. These are by no means offered as model programs; they are simply what worked for us in facing the challenges of access and excellence all of us now confront in higher education. At Kennesaw, these programs have enabled us to offer a "value-added" component to the education we provide to a student body that is incredibly diverse. A component "adds value" to the educational experience if it makes that experience more pleasant, more inviting, more challenging, and more useful to the student without increasing his or her costs.

**First-Year Experience Program.** Perhaps the most successful of these programs has been that of the first-year experience, first established on our campus over 20 years ago and still thriving today in greatly expanded form. This program, inspired by John Gardner's groundbreaking work in studying and implementing strategies for first-year success, includes a stand-alone course that covers topics ranging from the practical (learning about library resources, for instance, and time management skills) to the philosophical (asking students to consider the place of education in our culture and in their lives). The popularity of this course continues to grow; indeed, nearly 80 percent of our entering freshmen voluntarily register for it. To meet this increasing demand, our faculty routinely offer at least 35 sections of the course each semester, with each class limited to 25 students in order to encourage their participation in discussions and to facilitate meaningful faculty-student interaction.

Four years ago, our faculty and staff wrote and published the first-ever college-specific textbook for a first-year experience seminar. The title of the book—*Making Connections, Achieving Success, and Understanding Others: The First-Year Experience at Kennesaw State University*—highlights the wide-ranging focus of the course. It includes essays by administrators on the organization and history of the university; essays by faculty from across campus on the attractions and inspirations of their particular disciplines; instructional pieces by faculty and staff on achieving success in everything from financial management to research and test-taking; short memoirs by students detailing their experiences as members of the Kennesaw State community; and introductions from staff members to various aspects of student life, counseling and advising programs, and career services. The publication of this

textbook was a landmark occasion in the history of the first-year experience at Kennesaw State, and the collaborative nature of the production of the book mirrored the collaborative spirit that defined the program from the beginning.

Students who enroll in the program have been given access to higher education at Kennesaw, but certainly not to an institution with a “revolving door” policy. Rather, we invite our students to learn to see themselves as able, valuable, and responsible. They *do* succeed, and we have proven it. Student satisfaction with the course and their instructors is very high. The opportunity to develop mentoring relationships with the faculty is particularly important, as are the relationships students establish with their peers. Indeed, commuting students often find in this program a most welcome means of connecting with other members of the campus community, and this fact can make a profoundly positive difference in their sense of the overall college experience.

Many of these students are also working part- or full-time and raising families, and therefore they must feel at times that they are living a life totally disconnected from their studies. The first-year program encourages students to integrate the college experience into their overall lives, and enabling them to find sustaining relationships on campus is perhaps the key to this process. Then, too, we want our students to contribute to our campus community in significant ways, and clearly they can do so only if they are invited into a larger network of peers and mentors. Our success in meeting these goals has been recognized in significant ways. Last year, Kennesaw State was selected as one of 12 “Founding Institutions” in a project called “Foundations of Excellence in the First Year of College.” Organized by John Gardner’s internationally respected Policy Center on the First Year of College, this project will spotlight Kennesaw State for its best practices in establishing foundations of academic excellence for its students, first-year and beyond.

As an outgrowth of the overwhelmingly positive response to this first-year experience program, Kennesaw State is now offering a similar senior-year experience seminar designed to bridge the gap between a student’s senior year and his or her professional career. Through a series of readings, lectures, and exercises, the seminar focuses on the four principal components of the invitational model: being personally inviting with self, being personally inviting with others, being professionally inviting with self, and being professionally inviting with others. At the beginning and end of their undergraduate years, then, our students are asked to consider not only the practical concerns of their immediate future but also the question of how to live more fulfilling and meaningful lives. These foundational experiences now set the tone for the entire educational experience at Kennesaw State.

**Division of Student Success and Enrollment Services.** In 1995, I gathered together members of every campus constituency to collaborate on a “New View of the Future,” as we began to think past the new millennium in our planning. Drawing from our experience of the first-year experience, and particularly our renewed emphasis on our students, we outlined in this report the development of a new Division of Student Success and Enrollment Services, to be headed by a vice president serving on the

president's cabinet. We wanted to look beyond the bureaucratic functions of admissions, registration, and financial aid, for instance, and consider how we might define student success more broadly. One measure of such success, of course, involves the retention of students who are largely both nontraditional and commuters. We knew that if we could build programs and processes to make these students feel part of an inviting extended community, then we would be able to secure their success both academically and personally.

The collaborative nature of the first-year experience program also had a profound effect on our administration. In many ways it was the perfect vehicle to bring our administrative team together philosophically. Recognizing the impact the program had on faculty and students, we began to make student success *the* central concern of our administrative decisions. We had to take a long, hard look at the kind of campus we were becoming—we were soon to become a comprehensive state university—located as we were (and are) in one of the most rapidly growing counties in the entire country. How was our increasing diversity going to change our campus, and how could we simultaneously ensure the success of both traditional and nontraditional students? As a largely commuter campus, how could we increase student involvement in the campus community? All of these questions, so central to the development of our first-year experience course, became the preoccupation of our administrative team. We would soon be answering them in unexpected and innovative ways.

**Learning Support Programs and General Education.** After compiling our “New View of the Future,” we made a key decision with regard to our first-year experience program. Having previously housed the program in our Counseling, Advisement, and Placement Services Center, we agreed to move it into the newly formed Department of Learning Support Programs. This department would soon be subsumed under a new Dean of Undergraduate Studies and General Education, who was to answer to our Vice President for Academic Affairs. In sum, this gave our first-year program the most significant level of institutional support in its history. All of these changes point to an overall philosophy of education—namely, that the student's education is improved by consistency within his or her general program of study. With our realignment of the first-year experience program within our new General Education division, we now were in a much stronger position to explore the larger implications of the program itself.

**Communities for Learning Success.** Once we decided to make the first-year experience program part of our General Education division, we began to explore the full implications of that decision. On the one hand, we had a long-established first-year seminar through which we attempted to introduce our freshmen to the college experience in general and the Kennesaw State community in particular. On the other hand, we had a newly formed General Education program, the ultimate goal of which was to unify our general education offerings, giving students with a wide variety of backgrounds and interests a similar set of course requirements outside of their majors. Bringing these two programs together, our most pressing question became, How can we put the lessons we have learned from the seminar to use in developing the General Education program?

Our most productive answer to this question involved the founding of Communities for Learning Success, which offer students the opportunity to move through their first year of college as part of a “community” of 25 students taking the same three courses each semester. Again, with the first-year philosophy as its foundation, the Communities for Learning Success help us to give our students—both residential and commuter students—a strong sense of the college life as a shared experience. The program has also led to increased retention and graduation rates, not to mention its positive impact on student involvement in campus life.

As with the first-year experience course, the Communities for Learning Success have had a profound impact on our faculty, and for many of the same reasons. Within each community, three faculty members from different disciplines work together on setting the main objectives for the semester. An English professor may work alongside professors in math and computer science. To bring some unity to the series of classes, then, these professors must learn what is being taught in courses outside their expertise. What results is a strong sense of collegiality and collaboration, as a shared focus on student success overrides all other considerations. Thus, faculty members’ attitudes have changed as their teaching repertoire has been expanded. In one crucial regard, the Kennesaw State University faculty members of 2004 have a great deal in common with the much smaller faculty of Kennesaw College in 1983, when the first section of KC101 was offered. Despite the phenomenal growth of our university, our faculty members continue to discover that they are part of a close-knit community of educators and scholars. Communities for Learning Success, then, serve equally well as Communities for Faculty Success.

**Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL).** Of course, student success is inextricably linked with faculty success at any institution, and at Kennesaw State the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning has long provided invaluable resources to our faculty as they seek to develop professionally and engage in the scholarship of teaching. Established over 15 years ago, CETL continues to evolve on our campus, and the “CETL” concept has been implemented broadly in our state and nation. It has also been reinforced by the emergence of a national conversation on the scholarship of teaching and learning initiated by Ernest Boyer in the 1990s and promoted by Lee Shulman today. In the past two years, Kennesaw State launched two highly successful Faculty Leadership teams through CETL, bringing together interdisciplinary groups of faculty to explore common interests in a specialized area of teaching and learning. Both teams independently proposed the establishment of a set of CETL Faculty Fellows who would work with the CETL Director to implement substantive programs for the advancement of the following areas: (a) E-learning; (b) the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning; (c) the Reflective Practice of Teaching; (d) Scholarly Discourse Across Disciplines; and (e) Student Retention and Academic Success. Soon we will be working to elevate *Reaching Through Teaching*, the center’s quarterly publication, to a significant peer-reviewed online journal on teaching and learning, and CETL Faculty Fellows will collaborate on writing and submitting grant proposals designed to develop and promote model programs that advance teaching and learning on a university campus.

These exciting initiatives serve several important academic goals. First, they raise awareness of and respect for effective and scholarly teaching and learning on our campus. Second, they encourage reflection on the values and philosophies of teaching, facilitate faculty-driven teaching initiatives, stimulate and advance the scholarship of teaching and learning, and advance excellence in teaching. Finally, and most importantly, our students can only benefit from the work of faculty who reflect deeply not only on their disciplines but also on their responsibilities as instructors and mentors.

**Diversity Planning Council.** In order to create this kind of intentionally inviting university—one in which faculty and students strive together to realize their full potential—we had to ensure that a respect for diversity became a hallmark of campus life both inside and outside the classroom. In *Building a House for Diversity*, Roosevelt Thomas (1999) makes it clear that a strategic plan for diversity will not be successful unless everyone within an organization is committed to understanding differences and engaging others: “*True diversity management* begins and ends with individuals. It begins with each of us accepting our responsibility as actors in the diversity scenario, and it ends with our acquiring certain specific skills and achieving a level of maturity in our thinking and acting about diversity.” The job of our Diversity Planning Council, then, has been to foster an atmosphere within which such maturity will be achieved.

The 23-member council reflects the full spectrum of diversity at KSU. It includes administrators, faculty, staff, and students who are religiously diverse European Americans, African Americans, Latino Americans, Asian Americans, foreign nationals, male, female, old, young, gay, straight, tenured, nontenured, academic, and nonacademic. Through focus groups, one-on-one interviews, and research into best practices at other institutions, the Council is developing a Strategic Diversity Management Plan that will implement the university-wide planning, budgeting, and assessing of diversity programs and progress.

Kennesaw State is surprisingly diverse for a suburban campus in the southeastern United States:

- Ethnic minorities comprise 20 percent of the student body.
- African Americans account for 11 percent of the student population.
- More than 1,000 international students from over 120 countries represent 8 percent of student enrollment.
- Six out of every ten students are women.

Such encouraging diversity was not always the case on our campus. Two decades ago only 22 countries were represented at KSU, while ten years ago only 5 percent of students were African-American. Hispanic enrollment alone has increased more than 50 percent in the past four years. This positive trend toward a truly multicultural campus continues at an impressive rate. During the past five years, minority student enrollment for all major ethnic groups has outpaced that of the majority population. In addition,

our work to promote international studies has received nation-wide recognition, as the American Council on Education has selected Kennesaw State as one of only eight institutions in the country for a new study on “Global Learning for All.” As a project participants, we will provide examples of good practices in setting international learning goals, assessing internationalization activities, aligning international activities with learning goals, partnering with other institutions, and developing strategic internationalization plans that promote truly global student success.

Clearly, making diversity work on our campuses means advancing beyond the success of traditional approaches such as equal employment opportunity and affirmative action to the significance of recognizing and channeling the power of our diversity. It means transforming the success of integration and assimilation into a significant celebration of our differences. It means surpassing the successful recognition of our diversity with the significantly greater next step of institution-wide management of diversity for everyone’s benefit.

## **From Success to Significance: What Can Excellence Mean?**

These, then, are only a few of the invitational strategies that have enabled us at Kennesaw State University to provide quality of access and maintain high academic standards. We *can*, and indeed we *must*, maintain the same standards of excellence we always have. We must also, however, learn to deal with diversity by meeting our students—the ones we have, not necessarily the ones we’d like to have—wherever they are. The optimal inviting teacher is one who is optimally successful in guiding and facilitating student development—interpreted broadly to include social, emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual growth. Although this might seem like an impossible role for any one teacher to fill, we believe it is not only possible but also necessary. Of course, one teacher cannot actively *ensure* each student’s development in all of these areas, but the optimal teacher, by assuming a facilitative posture, can do his or her best to encourage the student to recognize his or her potential. This includes development in a multitude of areas outside the classroom.

To discuss the responsibilities of our teachers and administrators in this way is to reaffirm the ultimate purposes of education. Clearly we must offer our students more than a mere collection of courses or a ticket to a trade. At the close of Ernest Boyer’s monumental study *College: The Undergraduate Experience in America* (now 17 years old, this groundbreaking work still resonates mightily with educators), he asserts that “the idealism of the undergraduate experience must reflect itself in loyalties that transcend self. Is it too much to expect,” asks Boyer, “that even in this hard-edged, competitive age, a college graduate will live with integrity, civility—even compassion?” (1987). It strikes me that excellence might come to mean less about grade point average and SAT scores and more about learning precisely these values—integrity, civility, compassion.

Indeed, without this element of compassion and integrity—without tying what our students learn to deeper ethical principles—education often becomes the mere acquisition of knowledge. Boyer asserts that what our colleges are “teaching most successfully is competence—competence in meeting schedules, in gathering information, in responding well on tests, in mastering the details of a specific field.” We can update his list today to include mastering computer skills among the competencies students acquire. We must, of course, admit the enormous benefits technology has brought to higher education (and, indeed, our world), but we must also remember that there is no software available to instill in our students the virtues of compassion and integrity. By insisting on the centrality of social responsibility as one of our missions, the university can help create among our students and in the larger society what the contemporary poet Alan Brownjohn has called “a commonwealth of decency.” It is in this noble concept that we might discover the most fruitful opportunity for blending access and excellence.

This is the underlying thrust of the work of Lee Shulman, current president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. Shulman (1999) insists that we ask different questions of ourselves as administrators and faculty in considering institutional effectiveness, moving away from models of assessment that stress the all-too-familiar bureaucratic number-crunching. Instead, Shulman writes, “the questions we should be concerning ourselves with are questions about quality—and particularly about the quality of what our students come to understand, believe, and do on our watch.” Elsewhere, he captures the essence of what I have defined as an invitational approach to education with these questions: “What are our students really learning? What do they understand deeply? What kinds of human beings are they becoming—intellectually, morally, in terms of civic responsibility? How does our teaching affect that learning, and how might it do so more effectively?” (Hutchings and Shulman 1999). Shulman implies here that an essential part of our jobs as administrators and faculty is to encourage students to develop a more civic-minded, ethically mature sense of their place in the large community.

Metropolitan colleges and universities are in a unique position to meet these goals for higher education by honoring what Constantine Curris (2000) calls the “covenant that binds the public and its universities.” In his speech on “The Public’s College,” Curris notes that a central part of this covenant involves our “special responsibility to provide opportunities and perhaps guidance to our younger students, in order that they recognize and fulfill their civic responsibilities.” If we believe that access and excellence are only about gathering information or preparation for professional success, then we are severely limited in our thinking about the university’s responsibility. Curris points us toward a different conception of higher education, one in which excellence equals service and stewardship.

## **Becoming Cognizant of Our Mission: Some Closing Thoughts**

During these challenging times, changes are occurring in all facets of higher education. From the perspective of the president, this upheaval must be seen as an adventure. Again, we need to think beyond so-called “practical” education, where we focus on what our students need to know to succeed immediately in the workplace, and instead discover how we can prepare them to become caring, service-minded citizens. As I have said, to believe in the abilities of our students is the first step in making a commitment to excellence. Those who have been encouraged by our commitment to access should learn under our watch to be encouraging themselves as they become leaders in our communities. Those who have contributed to an energizing pluralism on our campuses should be mindful themselves of the benefits of pluralism in our society. Our ability to meet these standards of excellence begins when we welcome the diversity made possible through expanded access and learn to conquer what Parker Palmer (1998) calls the “fear of diversity.”

As Palmer says, “As long as we inhabit a universe made homogenous by our refusal to admit otherness, we can maintain the illusion that we possess the truth about ourselves and the world—after all, there is no ‘other’ to challenge us! But as soon as we admit pluralism, we are forced to admit that ours is not the only standpoint, the only experience, the only way, and the truths we have built our lives on begin to feel fragile.” Administrators and faculty must learn to welcome diversity as a way to discover untapped potential not only within the student body but also—and most importantly—*within themselves*.

I return again to Ernest Boyer (1987), who warned some 15 years ago that “if students do not see beyond themselves and better understand their place in our complex world, their capacity to live responsibly will be dangerously diminished.” His warning is even more urgent today, and it applies not only to our students but also to those of us who have the privilege of serving them. To live responsibly, Boyer implies, is to look outside the self. This means looking beyond everything that is immediate and familiar and comfortable. It means challenging ourselves, perhaps the most important requirement of lifelong learning.

When I reflect on our mission, I recall what Parker Palmer (2001) said at Kennesaw State’s convocation ceremony in October of 2001 about the man emerging from the dust and debris of the World Trade Center on September 11th. Asked by a policeman if he needed help, the man replied, “No, I have never been more cognizant in my whole life.” Palmer elaborated: “Cognizant. Fully aware. Thinking. Feeling. In the world with my mind, my heart, my body, my whole being. Aware now of what’s important and what isn’t important. Valuing people and ideas and possibilities. Fully *cognizant* for the first time in my life.”

Palmer's challenge to all of us that day was that we become cognizant of our lives and responsibilities *here and now*, and that we do so *on our own*. He said so quite plainly: "I believe the dedication of every good teacher and every good student is to wake up, to become aware." He also spoke that day of the need for each of us to turn toward our colleagues and our students to form stronger, more lasting connections: "In the educational community we need to understand that relationship isn't a sort of nicety to add on as frosting to the cake; it is at the core of our mission. It is at the core of our mission for at least two reasons. Number one, people *know* relationally, in community. And number two, people grow ethically and morally in relation, in community, with each other and with the great subjects that we teach."

Palmer's words have significance for anyone engaged in the process of making our campuses more inviting to a wider range of students, primarily because he insists on the ethical implications of our work as educators. His words remind us that the solitary teacher in front of a classroom—or the administrator in her office—is always part of a larger network of learners, and that to be dedicated to this profession is to pledge oneself to lifelong learning, a journey that is shared ideally with others in community. In a truly inviting college community, the students become the central focus of the work of administrators, faculty, and staff, whose responsibility it is to discover the best means by which to unite the twin goals of access and excellence. It is a great responsibility, to be sure, for our students are our future, yet it is inspiring to know that that future is bright with the promise of diversity.

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