

# **Facing the New Realities: The CUMU Conference at 10 Years**

David A. Caputo, Guest Editor

As the nearly two-hundred registrants and participants gathered in New York City for the Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities Tenth Conference, the concerns were real and the belief that substantial progress was possible in improving urban and metropolitan conditions was widely held. Perhaps it is this unique combination of concern about the present and belief in future progress which sets apart the current thinking and indeed the actions and programs being undertaken by urban and metropolitan universities from prior practices.

At a time when there are increased concerns about the cost and utility of many federal programs, urban and metropolitan universities cannot continue to assume that extensive public funding will be available for an extended period of time. Cities and counties are being asked to carry more of the costs associated with urban reforms and new program development. Federal and state dollars are less readily available, but the demands, such as education, health needs, or issues of public safety and security, have not abated. In fact, today's cities and metropolitan areas face problems and public policy issues of unprecedented complexity and importance. The future of our cities and metropolitan areas will help define the future of this country and indeed the future of urban and metropolitan centers around the world.

Consider for a moment the questions of security and whether our urban and metropolitan areas are more or less likely to be the target if there is another major terrorist attack. While recent experiences would suggest all public infrastructures are at risk, the complexity of modern day urban and metropolitan life and the population density found in these areas make them exceptionally high-risk targets of significant vulnerability.

America's urban leaders, including educational leaders, understand the need to be proactive to prevent such attacks, but the real issues are whether the urban and metropolitan governments have the expertise, the funds, and the will to meet these challenges. These are significant questions and very different from those raised in past CUMU conferences where discussions often centered on crime rates and how to reduce them in urban and metropolitan areas.

This year the security emphasis and the concern over the vulnerability to terrorist attacks was a major theme at the conference and a major new reality for all to consider. This should not be a surprise as individual and collective security concerns were major factors in the 2004 Presidential election, remain high priority items for President Bush's second term, and are major issues for the political leaders of America's urban and metropolitan centers.

The devastating economic, social, and individual impact of such attacks was brought home when conference attendees spent an afternoon visiting the site of the World Trade Center attacks and heard presentations from representatives of the Port Authority and the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation (LMDC). Kevin Rampe of the LMDC explained the agency's role in helping the Lower Manhattan community recover from the unparalleled terrorist attacks. Authur Cifelli of the Port Authority explained how the transportation infrastructure was rebuilt as a result of a heroic effort by rescue, construction and city/state workers. U.S. Representative Gerald Nadler from New York's Eighth Congressional District outlined the major areas where cities such as New York were most vulnerable and the need for coordinated and multi-layered public decision-making to reduce the risks to the residents in urban and metropolitan areas.

The crucial point to remember and the point made by every speaker who discussed this topic is that the college and university emergency planning process now needs to include plans to respond to major, unexpected terrorist attacks. It is imperative that carefully spelled out and well-conceived plans are in place. College and university leaders have an important role to play in developing their plans and being sure their campuses are prepared for a catastrophic event of this type. For many, the panels dealing with security issues brought this point home and provided some general outlines for the very specific plans which are needed to meet the broad set of security issues.

A second major issue widely discussed and debated at this year's conference was education – from the intent and impact of the No Child Left Behind federal legislation to the many changes underway due to the continuing educational mandates from state and federal governments. Clearly the emphasis here is on accountability, but questions related to budget responsibilities and oversight maintenance often are included. As state and federal governments have felt free to impose new standards and requirements, urban and metropolitan areas have found themselves in the difficult position of being required to respond to new expectations without the needed funds for the vast programmatic changes. These unfunded mandates have added significant costs to urban and metropolitan jurisdictions and have fueled bitter policy disputes. One of the enduring future questions will be how these disputes are resolved and which mandates stay in place. There also was considerable interest in measuring the impact of these new programs and the impact they are having.

Joel Klein, New York's School Chancellor, did an outstanding job pointing out the challenges and opportunities facing urban and metropolitan governments when attempting comprehensive reform of their public schools. He stressed the importance of innovation and leadership required to make the needed changes to guarantee that students entering the public school system will be successfully educated. This fact, coupled with the difficulties of managing large school districts with limited financial resources, will determine the future success of educational reform in our urban and metropolitan school districts. Clearly the call was for significant change but it remains unclear if the results of such change will lead to the desired outcome of improved student achievement.

Security and education were joined by a very traditional issue: Growth and economic development are needed to build local and regional economies that are diversified and resilient in the face of the widespread changes occurring in the United States as a result of the globalization of the American economy.

Urban and metropolitan leaders have seen their economic base change and usually the change is due to conditions beyond their control. In order to foster economic development, emphasis on creativity and strong leadership seems most likely responsible for positive solutions. Economic development now involves more than simply offering incentives such as tax abatements or site improvements that result in attracting new and varied businesses. Instead, the goal is a diverse enough set of jobs and educational opportunities to provide a revenue base serving the urban or metropolitan population as underlying economic factors change (for example, the change from a manufacturing to a service economy). This complex goal requires a much more comprehensive strategy and often different financial support to accomplish.

In order to be successful, economic development efforts require a new emphasis on high technology and job creation in the rapidly changing areas of software development, biotechnology and bioinformatics for example. As urban and metropolitan centers develop plans to create and attract these industries, partnerships with colleges and universities are required to provide both the knowledge base and education needed for success in these very competitive areas. New and innovative economic structures, such as jointly managed business incubators or high tech center planning, are required for success. The availability of appropriate higher education institutions willing to invest and support these partnerships will do a great deal to determine the future of the new economic order in many urban and metropolitan areas. Urban and metropolitan leaders would do well by studying prior successes and attempting to develop plans with specific goals and inviting an extensive array of partners to participate.

Jay Kriegal, Director of New York City's 2012 Olympic bid, presented an example of the new economic approach. A major emphasis in the city's bid is how the proposed games would be an economic catalyst attracting both public and private investment and stimulating economic activity in different parts of the city. This theme stressed the significance of developing and expanding the economic base of the entire city and region. In addition, the host city committee has worked to establish a large number of partnerships, including partnerships with Pace and other universities which have contributed educational services as well as venues in the planning and bid preparation process.

This reflects the current theme of many economic development proposals to attract industries as well as establish economic incubator sites and other innovative approaches. Urban and metropolitan governments have become more imaginative in partnering with other institutions, such as universities, business groups, and NGOs, than in the past. The result is a more comprehensive and often original attempt to attract and retain a future economic base. Again, innovation and ideas are paramount for success.

In a powerful opening speech, Columbia University's, Dr. Manning Marable challenged the conference participants to be sensitive to and creative in dealing with his concern about racial diversity and democracy. According to Marable, America's urban and metropolitan universities must engage government and community leaders in dialogue and action programs that increase meaningful participation and help reduce the economic, political, and social divisions between various ethnic and racial groups. This is not a new challenge, but given America's changing demographic profile, it is a challenge of unprecedented importance. The very future of our urban and metropolitan centers will be determined by how successfully they respond to these complex issues.

Marable advocated direct discussion of this issue and the commitment of appropriate financial and human capital resources to ensure progress is made. The consequence of not progressing on this issue is predictable: Tension, unrest, and even disruption. Again urban and metropolitan universities have an important responsibility to be involved at all levels and to make sure they are engaged in proposing creative and meaningful decisions in these areas. Here college and university leadership is most important.

As educators long convinced of and committed to educating the whole student, including their need to be responsible, civically engaged individuals, conference participants the CUMU Tenth Anniversary conference focused on civic engagement. Several panels explored various ways urban and metropolitan colleges and universities are pursuing and should pursue programs to increase civic engagement on their campuses. It was clear that both the individual student and society (whether it be a neighborhood or a particular agency) benefits from increased civic engagement. Project Pericles and other national movements stressing the importance of individual responsibility and collective engagement were discussed.

The crucial element for success in these efforts to increase civic engagement is to have strong support for such activities throughout the organization – faculty, staff and students must want to participate and need to understand the importance of their participation for the health of the process and the community. Civic engagement must be both sustained and beneficial to the community if it is to be successful in the long term. Here urban and metropolitan universities have taken the lead in developing, implementing and sustaining civic engagement initiatives. This commitment needs to continue and expand if such programs are to be successful.

The conference also had several sessions that stressed specific historical or programmatic themes. A plenary session recalling the origins of the CUMU was well received. The presidents and other participants who spoke offered unique and important perspectives on the creation and subsequent development of CUMU. CUMU's growth, development of appropriate public policy issues, and its concerted efforts to improve the economic, social, and political vitality of America's urban and metropolitan centers are noteworthy. CUMU, through its annual conference, publications and continued support for deliberative analyses of public policy issues has played and will continue to play an important role in the public dialogue dealing with urban and metropolitan America.

A related session dealt with the use of the media by CUMU and its members. A distinguished panel of print, electronic and documentary leaders stressed the need for CUMU to develop specific and timely stories to illustrate the various programs undertaken by member institutions and how these programs influence the quality of life in all urban and metropolitan areas. The panelists were told that it is the urban and metropolitan universities which are in the cauldron of public discussion and debate and that CUMU institutions are uniquely to be major and positive forces in the development and implementation of ideas and plans designed to improve public policy and confidence in the legitimacy of urban and metropolitan governments. This is an important obligation and responsibility, which is taken very seriously by CUMU institutions and one that will continue into the future.

The CUMU Tenth Annual Conference also included a visit to an exhibit featuring the history of Florence and the role of the Medici family in Florentine history. Participants, as they viewed the important works of art on loan from the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, realized the sustained importance of cities in the development and support of the creative and artistic spirit. In addition, the relationship between government and economic activity was also stressed. Nearly five hundred years later, these remain enduring aspects of urban and metropolitan life.

The ultimate success of CUMU's Tenth Annual Conference will be measured by the reflection and ideas that generate future action and programs. Success will be measured by the innovative programs, which address the basic questions of social justice, political participation, and economic development. Selected papers from the conference presented in this issue of *Metropolitan Universities* offer you a sample of the breadth and depth of the discussions. Participants at the Tenth Annual Conference left with a better understanding of the new realities and with determination to continue the positive impact CUMU has had over the years it has been in existence. Only time and the future record of accomplishments will determine how successful CUMU's institutions will be in meeting the many challenges ahead but, I, for one, am confident the CUMU institutions will continue to be successful in providing the leadership urban and metropolitan areas will need to thrive and prosper!

## **Acknowledgement**

Pace University was pleased to host the Tenth Annual Coalition of urban and Metropolitan Universities Conference. Dan Slippen, Director of the University's Center for Downtown New York and Director of Government and Community Relations, chaired Pace's organizing efforts. Slippen and his organizing committee deserve the compliments they received for a well-done conference. I would like to thank the CUMU leadership, my colleagues at Pace, the speakers and participants and the countless others who worked tirelessly to ensure the conference's success.

## **Author Information**

David A. Caputo is President of Pace University in New York City and Westchester County, New York. He is a political scientist with a PhD from Yale University and has written extensively in the area of urban and intergovernmental relations.

David A. Caputo  
President  
Pace University  
One Pace Plaza  
New York, NY 10038  
E-mail: [president@pace.edu](mailto:president@pace.edu)