

Increasing the possibilities through shared spaces

Guest Editor Heidi Lasley Barajas

In the 2015 State of the Union address, President Barack Obama stated that as a nation, “we are a strong, tight-knit family who has made it through some very, very hard times.” He continued by asking us to consider “who we want to be over the next fifteen years.” Urban-serving institutions, along with our urban neighbors, have been through some very hard times, and continue to focus on our commitment to shared work for a more successful future. Moreover, we pay attention and continually reflect on how we occupy the space in which we make decisions and do the work of campus and community partnerships. That is what being a tight-knit family is about—everyone deciding how to pull together, working with mutual respect for mutual benefit. And, although the context above is specific to the United States, many urban-situated institutions across the world share similar concerns and hopes.

Engaging with communities to focus on urban issues represents one way that higher education institutions are transforming into the 21st century. The Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities (CUMU) member institutions have made intentional and innovative investments in place-based and shared learning spaces. There is growing attention to the role that physical and practical spaces plays in our interactions with communities, particularly as we work to deepen those interactions and search for effective approaches to urban opportunities and challenges. Understanding how we share space calls attention to (and aids in moving away from) transactional or episodic work toward sustained work with measurable results. And, our institutions have both distinctive and common approaches in our design, purpose and operations of spaces intended to enhance shared work and interaction between campus and communities.

The articles crafted for this issue on shared spaces describe the structure, operations and funding for multiple ways of approaching the idea of shared space for shared work. In addition, those who contributed their stories have reflected deeply on impacts, successes, and challenges. My hope is that the experiences and lessons learned in the context of decisions and actions shared by these higher education institutions will help all of us in the work of our urban and metropolitan institutions.

Public engagement and engaged scholarship practices are gaining momentum in many universities, and the idea of shared spaces for this work may serve to increase the depth and impact of interactions in ways that respond to both campus and community questions and goals. All nine contributions to this issue include the idea of building shared physical spaces for shared learning. Our colleagues from the University of British Columbia have provided an interesting frame to approach the idea of shared spaces and learning. They assert that working at the boundary between university and community involves creating different kinds of spaces for knowledge production. In some cases, a place-based, physical space has been established to facilitate knowledge production. In other cases, a shared learning space occurs in some expected and sometimes unexpected spaces. Each space has been built around the context of the institution and community as well as the needs of both.

The place-based approaches are both well established, as long as 17 years, and in new development, as recently as 2 years. The Community University Partnership Programme (CUPP) has been operating at the University of Brighton since 2003. In this article, Davies et al. discuss past and current approaches to the space needs of university-community partnership work and consider physical, relational, and virtual spaces in order to better identify what kinds of spaces are needed for collaborative partnership work to thrive.

Hynie, MacNevin, Prescod, Rieder, and Schwartzentruber describe how internal and external university changes create opportunities and challenges when attempting to build and sustain shared physical space utilized in campus-community work. The Community Engagement Center (CEC), a place-based center in proximity to York University has faced environmental changes. They explain that when such changes occur (policies, funding sources, government, new administrative leadership, etc.), those in the institution may begin to question whether or not a place-based center is the best approach to engagement work. The authors stress the importance of the CEC maintaining its role as a bridge between the university and the community, a bridge that enables innovative approaches to achieving common goals, provides important educational experiences to students, and allows for an expansion of what is considered knowledge production

Barajas and Martin explore the idea of liminal space in relation to fostering transformational scholarship and community trust in a place-based University of Minnesota research and outreach-engagement center located in north Minneapolis. Lessons from the first five years suggest that attention to building a beautiful and accessible physical space is necessary but not sufficient for building strong community-university partnership. The conceptual and epistemological components of shared space proved to be equally important. This article shares how UROC developed and cultivated a liminal space between university and community that is just safe enough for everyone to feel discomfort and challenge. They found that being able to feel safe enough to be uncomfortable together is a critical aspect of shared space that seeks to transform the unequal access to knowledge/power experienced by communities of color in urban areas.

Towle and Leahy discuss university-community partnership in terms of organizational structure and sustainability. The Learning Center, a place-based project established by the University of British Columbia in 1999, provides a place in the community where UBC students and faculty, and community residents and organizations connect. The Learning Center provides an intellectual space that focuses on learning not service provision, and encourages the co-creation of new knowledge. Towle and Leahy discuss shared space in terms of physical, emotional and intellectual environments and share valuable lessons learned about each. In particular, the authors discuss the importance of co-creating shared values and principles rather than rules, which impacts the operation of the physical space and also the emotional and intellectual environments in which diverse groups participate

The last place-based example is located on a university campus opening its doors in the last two years. Woods, Reed, and Smith-Howell describe the process of building the Barbara Weitz Community Engagement Center (CEC) at the University of Nebraska-Omaha. The CEC on-

campus space for the university's outreach and engagement efforts includes its Service Learning Academy and its rapidly expanding Office of Civic and Social Responsibility that provides shared space for over thirty nonprofit, government, university and student organizations. The CEC offers a collaborative environment, hosts multiple community events, and provides an open door to the UNO campus itself. The authors discuss 3 critical factors in building and sustaining the CEC including building engagement into the fabric of the university, privately funded community chairs and other funding for engagement, and external recognition for engagement work through the Carnegie classification.

Learning spaces not connected to a physical university building begin with the article by Smith-Arthur and Spring from Portland State University. This article focuses on university/correctional institutional partnerships where incarcerated learners and university students engage in academic coursework together within the confines of correctional facilities. The concept of physical, intellectual, and social learning spaces is explored through three capstone courses offered within the university that are focused on writing and art workshops for juvenile inmates, civic engagement and civic leadership within both men's and women's correctional facilities, and gardening where students learn gardening skills from inmates at a women's prison. While the experiences of the learners are important and described in this article, the lens used to describe these experiences is one that focuses on transformational learning. The authors describe the ways in which shared learning spaces can be transformative for both the learners and for the institution.

Hall and Panarese from the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth discuss the notion of building community through the "Building Community Project," an interdisciplinary approach to engage in democratic dialogue utilizing mindfulness to improve educational offerings. The events brought together university faculty and students as well as individuals from the local community in an inclusive learning space to share different perspectives on educational processes. The authors highlight the outcomes and data from three events to encourage teachers to incorporate mindfulness in the classroom. Intersecting this model with literacy and diversity, teachers are taught to build relationships with students who are then taught to build more effective relationships with their peers. The authors suggest that events designed to create safe and respectful shared learning spaces that connect ideas about teaching and learning among diverse stakeholders have the potential to bridge theory into practice. This article like others in this issue have indicated co-created knowledge involves shared spaces, shared understandings, and shared intentions.

Kinders and Pope describe the partnership formed between the University of Central Oklahoma and the Greater Oklahoma City Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. This article provides detailed information about the local context of the Hispanic population, which has nearly doubled from 2000-2010, many of whom are immigrants. The purpose of the shared space partnership related in the paper is to provide acculturation, college-going, and business development opportunities to this growing population. The partnership has resulted in new services through the Hispanic Chamber provided by the university. In addition, creating this shared space inspired the university Hispanic faculty Association to deepen its role, has inspired new service-learning offerings, and other opportunities to enhance both university and community learning.

Finally, Luter from the University of Wisconsin Extension provides a discussion about the link between the work of school reform and neighborhood development. Luter argues that place-based approaches in the literature are incomplete because the link between neighborhood improvement and school improvement has been ignored. The claim is that the concept of place-based school reform has not been clearly defined conceptually and developing that shared space could be an important approach to social change. He suggests that universities may sometimes forget they share urban space with communities and that leadership within universities is needed to co-create these shared spaces with the neighborhoods in which they reside.

This special issue of *Metropolitan Universities* provides examples of how urban serving universities are reaching out to their geographic communities and working to create shared spaces. More importantly, universities are finding ways to co-produce knowledge with communities that lead to strategies for addressing pressing community concerns. It is exciting to know that these examples, along with many others across the country and the world, are discovering, reflecting and co-creating with stunning impacts.

Author Information

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