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## Trends in Outreach and Service

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**A**s universities seek to retain the trust and support of multiple publics (taxpayers, alumni, legislators, donors, and community leaders), they must respond more rapidly than in the past to the complex needs of a volatile society. This kind of response will come from all universities, but it is particularly urgent for urban universities, like Wayne State University, which have long assumed an obligation to serve the metropolitan area that surrounds them. The urgency is increased, moreover, by the condition of many urban school districts, which only exacerbates problems of poverty, poor housing, and racial tension. Recently, for example, at the behest of Michigan Governor John Engler, the City of Detroit assumed responsibility for the Detroit Public Schools (DPS). Wayne State University has pledged itself to major assistance to bring about reform in the DPS (P. Walsh-Sarnecki 1999).

### Relation of the University to the Community

One clear trend in defining the relationship between the university and the community or its agencies is that the collaboration is one of equals, both of whom draw value from the relationship. Gone is the notion that the university studies the metropolitan area as a laboratory or serves the city as a master. Instead, both sides understand the relationship may not be easy, but that it is a benefit to both, neither of which is the sole authority.

This concept of engagement and collaboration is spreading rapidly across the country: It is notable in the "Milwaukee idea" of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (M. J. Brukardt), and in the Great Cities Project of the University of Illinois at Chicago (Great Cities Institute); it is inherent in "Returning to Our Roots: The Engaged Institutions," (National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, 1999.)

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## Finding Faculty Members

The faculty is, of course, the primary means of response to the community that any university has. And present conditions call for new ways for mobilizing and motivating faculty members to do service and outreach. A major issue that confronts the university with its unitary disciplines is that community issues do not respect fields of study or faculty specialties. Universities will, therefore, need to organize faculty members according to issues, rather than specialties. At Wayne State, for example, the Skillman Center for the Child has led the way to organizing a Round Table of Full Service for

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the Schools, which consists of faculty members from education, psychology, sociology, nursing, medicine, social work, libraries, the Merrill-Palmer Institute, etc. (Skillman Center for Children). With such a structure, a principal or school administrator can easily find individuals most likely to address a school issue within the university, or the person consulted will probably know where to find a

likely collaborator. An outsider does not have to search through a maze of colleges, departments, centers and institutes, some of which may be discouraging dead-ends. A similar structure exists at Wayne State for family and parenting issues (College of Urban, Labor and Metropolitan Affairs, Wayne State University 1999). As long as it carefully develops good networks, a university does not need to reorganize to respond quickly to pressing social issues at the same time that it is being challenged by changes in the disciplines to create centers and institutes that are multidisciplinary. But to respond rapidly, it must attend to how an outsider can find his or her way around the maze to individuals with appropriate interests. Then the dialogue can be productive and the response virtually immediate. An inquiry from the community can represent a career opportunity for the right faculty member at the right time.

## Faculty Development

Faculty members are now very much aware that many professionals seek training in other fields as their careers progress and their skills become dated. Wayne State offers many master's programs to professionals working in the Detroit area. Engineers already employed at Ford Motor Co. take master's work offered on computers in their offices, and doctors seek MBA's and MPH's, depending on their career tracks. Continuing education for the professions is a big business now. Offering these opportunities is the curricular counterpart to other service to the community, and major universities give much of value to professionals in these programs. Yet faculty members rarely believe that, having earned the highest degree, they should inform themselves about possibilities of

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professional development in their careers — learning to teach distance-learning courses, designing short courses and workshops, learning about how adults learn, or even mastering the principles of marketing their courses or programs.

Universities have the technological means to relate to the public in ways that are unique to our time, and faculty members who do not

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adapt to those means will not be able to compete with others who have. The student is less a captive audience than a sophisticated consumer who may "mix and match" his or her curriculum at a variety of schools and colleges at the same time. Faculty will need to plan what curricula are suitable for distance learning and which are not, but they cannot judge until they are thoroughly informed about what is possible. They will need to study the profile of their students, a.k.a. market, in

order to motivate students effectively, and to engage other as yet untapped sectors of students. Most students are rapidly coming to resemble non-traditional students in the way in which they relate to the university, and faculty members need to understand the implications of these developments for the way they teach.

### University Responsibilities

The responsibilities of institutions will change as well. Universities will have to begin to collaborate with one another to support very expensive programs regionally so that the costs may be spread around and students will continue to have access within a reasonable distance. This kind of collaboration will be particularly important for disciplines where laboratory experience is essential and where training sites with actual patients are essential.

Universities will also need to provide more incentives to faculty members to do service and outreach than the institutions have heretofore. This is especially important for research universities, where research and teaching have long been privileged over service. Emerging universities, like Wayne State, newly included in the ranks of Carnegie I, have been reluctant to allow faculty members to "serve their way to tenure." Yet some adjustment in this posture must be made if a more active and responsive university is urgently required. The way in which universities have gradually addressed the issues concerning quality of teaching has been to present measurable outcomes in the form of student and peer evaluations, teaching portfolios, and other evidence that students were in fact learning what they had been taught. In scholarship, the evidence for quality and impact have become more precise, too, in quality of journals, citation indices, outside evaluations, etc. Now provosts or presidents who discount the value of a given program with the public schools have just about as much evidence as those who may be enthusiastic

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about the same program — none. A first step in beginning to take service programs more seriously might be the requirement of measurable outcomes that would give both public agencies and educational institutions assurance of quality and impact of the project. ■

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#### About the Authors

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