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Metropolitan Universities and the Culture of Research

Metropolitan universities are the land-grant universities of the future. Over 80 percent of the population resides in urban environments. A majority of the problems and challenges faced by society are urban focused. Although higher education collectively must address these problems, metropolitan universities are at the front line.

I was raised in the land-grant tradition. My faculty and first administrative experiences were in two rural land-grant universities. It was both revealing and disturbing to move to a university in a large urban environment after 26 years in Happy Valley. Social unrest, persistent poverty, struggling inner city schools, lack of medical care, drugs, suburban flight, and joblessness, issues that I viewed from hotel rooms in the past, have become realities for me. My car was broken into for the first time, and I closely monitor the condition of my house security alarm.

I recently interviewed a candidate for a distinguished professorship from a land-grant university. I spoke about the many roles played by faculty in the urban environment, about my daily contact with people in the city -- educators, business leaders, ministers, politicians -- and about a student clientele far removed from the traditional 18 to 21 year old to which I was accustomed.

I told the candidate about the significant monetary support we received from individuals and corporations in the community. At that point the candidate looked at me and observed that urban outreach was much more effective when you lived in the environment; shades of agricultural outreach and extension of land-grants in rural environments.

The growing success of urban universities is tied to their increasing ability to integrate service and outreach into their mission. The urban environment is playing a growing role as a laboratory for education and research. Indeed, many programs would cease to exist without the urban en-

vironment.

In our effort to increase our urban mission, we must keep in focus that at the core of our success is our research, our scholarship. This observation raises the continuing debate over the role of research in higher education, an issue that dominates any discussion of the role and responsibilities of higher education in today's volatile environment of scarce resources and high accountability.

It is acknowledged by many in higher education that, even though our mission statements are comprehensive, for the most part, faculty are being supported and rewarded to fulfill only one part of our mission, research. It is recognized that change is imperative, if we are to meet the challenges of our rapidly evolving society.

The change we are calling for is a change in a culture that currently permeates our academic institutions. It is a change that involves all of us, faculty and administrators alike. It is a change that is not intended to threaten the basic quality of the research commitment and infrastructure. It is a change that will make us much better stewards of the support that the public has intrusted to us though their tuition and taxes.

Before I address the nature of the change needed, I would like to reexamine the research mission of a university. I do this because it is important for us to place research in the context of our overall mission, which the need for change addresses.

The professoriate is populated by those of us who were raised in the solid tradition of better living through research. We have done a superb job of reproducing ourselves. We have spread through the system of higher education and infused it with our culture. Up to now, we, not the state nor the people, have set the agenda for higher education.

Indeed, better living through research is a worthy tradition. Research, referred to here as scholarship in its more encompassing form, has been, and will continue to be, at the core of excellence in the university. Research in the academy has provided the foundation for many of the achievements of humankind, and is at the heart of graduate education. Scholarship drives excellence in all our activities, including the education of our students, undergraduates as well as graduates. Scholarship is also at the foundation of our outreach and service to the community of which we are a part.

I emphasize the symbiosis between scholarship and learning and outreach, because I fear that in our effort to bring the academy to its full potential in this period of accountability and the need for change, we will create a metastable structure that is doomed to failure. Nothing epitomizes the potential for such a destabilizing structure more clearly than the "teaching versus research" mentality. To develop a structure in which teachers are separated from researchers counters the fundamental process that drives enthusiasm for teaching and learning, and that nurtures excellence in the academy.

The research enterprise has grown enormously over the past 30 years, both in terms of cost and faculty commitment. For some, publications and grants have become ends in themselves. The preoccupation with research has, at times, impacted our commitment to the education of our students and has diverted resources, both human and monetary, into second class scholarship, published in second class journals, never to be read again. And I assure you this happens in all our universities!

However, lest you misinterpret me, it is important to note that we continue to sustain the world's leading universities. Look carefully at the institutions of higher learning that students rate at the top of their lists, those institutions where you would

like to send your children, where you would like to go. Whether they be four-year colleges or comprehensive research universities, you will find that in these institutions, scholarship and excellence in research are at the foundation of the quality of education received by the students.

But, then, what needs to be changed? What is this talk about a needed change in the academic culture? Our understanding, and importantly, acceptance of what is meant by scholarship, and how it impacts faculty roles, needs to be broadened considerably from the traditional definition of research if we are to meet the needs of today's society. This is an issue of particular importance to those of us working in urban universities. Much attention has been given to the issue of what we mean by scholarship. The highly publicized Ernest Boyer report, *Scholarship Reconsidered*¹, is at the heart of the movement to broaden our understanding of scholarship.

We need to reassess faculty roles and how they are rewarded. Faculty creativity and excellence in the educational process, including the classroom, laboratory, theater, studio, hospital, schoolroom, and wherever students seek knowledge, needs to be recognized and rewarded. Faculty creativity and excellence in our outreach to the community, whether addressing the complex issues related to improving K-12 and early childhood education, improving the health of the community through prevention education, strengthening the urban economy, understanding the impact of diversity on our urban problems, or improving the quality of our natural resources, needs to be recognized and rewarded. In the past, much of these faculty commitments have been given passing recognition at best. This is where we must change.

We also need to recognize that the type of students we serve has evolved significantly over the past 30 years, and that we need to change our way of thinking as we address their educational needs. This is an issue particularly pertinent to universities in urban environments.

Today's students include spouses returning to complete an education, people needing re-education to re-enter the changing employment market, business people who need to understand the growing complexity of the international economy, teachers who are challenged by the rapid evolution of the sciences, single parents who have acquired new responsibilities, people who wish to broaden their appreciation of the arts and humanities, students of many races and cultures, and, yes, lest we forget, those traditional students that used to be our primary clientele.

We must also review the structure of our universities if we are to successfully address the needs of society. Communities have problems. Universities have departments. The independence of faculty and disciplines is both our strength and weakness. Departments measure their worth by comparing themselves with departments at other universities, not in terms of whether they are meeting the university's mission.

Disciplinary peer review is needed, but it does not preclude valuing the interdisciplinary efforts required to solve the increasingly complex problems faced by society today. As an example, addressing the pre-college education crisis requires us to go beyond curriculum, standards, and teacher education. The solution to the K-12 education problem requires the combined expertise of those involved in education, science, economics, nutrition, health care, cultural diversity, drugs, child/parental relationships, and more. Science faculty working with education faculty on K-12 may be valued more by the education faculty and members of the community than by the faculty in the science department in which their tenure is held. Tenure is a beautiful concept. It leads to a rich environment for inquiry and learning. The freedom to be creative and push the limits in scholarly pursuits, popular or unpopu-

lar, is central to excellence in the academy. However, this independence also works against the cooperative efforts needed to meet society's needs. Trying to get faculty to work together is often like trying to herd cats. However, if you put the food out, they will come.

Our metropolitan universities stand at a crossroads. As our mission and responsibilities evolve, and as we reach out to the community, we need also to insure our primary mission, to provide our students with an excellent and stimulating learning environment. This means that we will have to confront the complex issues that have led to the perceived and real distortion of the academic mission that has been brought about by major growth in the research enterprise.

Over the past 30 years our universities have evolved from highly respected, isolated ivory towers, to highly visible and vulnerable institutions. During this transition, accountability for the roles of faculty has become a major issue. The challenge we face then is to change a culture, a way of thinking, without at the same time damaging the core of the university, its scholarship. Urban universities provide us with a particularly rich and challenging environment in which to bring about this change.

As we expand the dimension of faculty roles that we should recognize, it is essential that we learn to respect each other for the various roles assumed, whether we contribute through classic scholarship or scholarship applied to learning and to the community around us.

The task of bringing our academic institutions into the mainstream of the 21st century will not be easy. The issues we must confront are complex, and change is always difficult. There are those who simply do not believe we have a problem; those who believe that they are surrounded by people who could not cut the mustard in research. I know. I was one of these researchers for more than 20 years.

When I am asked about our university, I still find that I brag about our successful research programs, how much National Institutes of Health money we are bringing in; rather than about our successful work in precollege education or the outreach programs of our business and nursing schools. It is understandable, then, that I waiver at times about my commitment to change.

Yes, there are those out there who cannot cut the mustard -- in anything -- who have never gone beyond a classroom mentality, who rile against the researchers as an excuse for not facing their responsibilities. When I speak the lines of expanded scholarship and teaching, they embrace me, thinking that salvation has finally arrived.

There are also many superb researchers who are also superb teachers, some of whom are involved in effective outreach, but they are rewarded for their research. And then, there are those who are good researchers, but whose primary strengths are in creative teaching and outreach.

It is these people whom we need to recognize and make full members of the academy. There are many out there, many of whom still pursue unproductive research because the academy, administrators and faculty alike, is having difficulty breaking away from a research reward mentality. We waste faculty time and resources because of this mind set, and the community loses.

Freeing these faculty from this mind set and recognizing and rewarding their contributions outside of the traditional research paradigm will go a long way to placing our institutions of higher learning back into a leadership role in our society. I need to stress that excellence, as delineated by peer review, must always be at the core of all that we do in the academy.

We will be successful when we, as a university community, recognize and reward all of those who provide excellence across the mission of our institution. This change in culture will allow metropolitan universities to maximize their impact on finding solutions to the many problems and challenges faced by those of us who live in urban environments. Only then will we be recognized as good stewards of the public support entrusted to us.