

# From the Editor

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Is the academic culture of urban and metropolitan universities different from that of other universities? Such a question is not only controversial, but also difficult to objectify in ways that would support documentation and analysis. There is little doubt that the composition and priorities of faculty at urban and metropolitan institutions are distinctive in some ways and traditional in others. In addition, metropolitan working environments and student characteristics put unique pressures on academic culture and practices. At the same time, most of these faculty have as their only model the traditional cultural contexts and practices that emulate the “standard” approach to organizing academic life, departmental operations and the nature of faculty roles and rewards.

The general stereotype of metropolitan universities is that their faculty communities consist of a high proportion of part-time and adjunct faculty, and tenure-track faculty who are highly diverse. Many have traditional educational backgrounds, others became academics as a second career, and they all live and work as commuters just like the students. At some metropolitan institutions, about half of all undergraduate courses are taught by non-tenure track faculty, yet only a few campuses have implemented formal strategies for involving those faculty in the governance of the organization. These conditions are in part the result of the chronic underfunding common to these universities. More positively, these traits are also a reflection of the rich intellectual resources of cities where there is ready access to top leaders and professionals in business, government, community and cultural sectors. Such experts enhance the learning experiences of students and the intellectual life of departments...if academic practices, policies, and personalities welcome these non-tenure track colleagues into the community of the institution.

Given these and other core characteristics, the traditions of academe that were invented in older, more traditional campuses are often awkward to translate into the urban and metropolitan university reality. For example, with classes spread from 7 am–10 pm, just finding a common and convenient time for department or committee meetings can be a daunting problem! Faculty come and go at different times, and may not be housed or teaching in contiguous spaces that would promote informal interaction. Part-time faculty may not even have offices or phone numbers, and usually come to campus only a few hours a week. Full-time tenure track faculty are often pressed by heavy course loads and advising duties. Building a sense of academic community in such an environment may seem nearly impossible. Yet, in the face of these and other challenging conditions, faculty and academic administrators constantly strive to create a sense of an intellectual community, a common sense of mission, and a coherent agenda for scholarship and teaching.

At the core of this work is the need to address the issue of governance. Internally, the challenge of creating and sustaining capacity for and commitment to shared governance is a work-in-progress at every academic institution. Though defined in many different ways and enacted in many different forms, each academic institution seeks to build both process and commitment to shared governance that is the hallmark of an intellectual community. My own observation of many of our urban and metropolitan institutions is that the distinctive characteristics and conditions described above make it even more important that these campuses develop a clear consensus about the institution's mission and common expectations for how the organization will operate, share information, ensure consultation and participation, and make decisions. The most successful urban and metropolitan campuses (places with high morale, good faculty and student retention, innovation, achievement in teaching, scholarship, and engagement), are those where there is an obvious shared understanding of the organizational personality and priorities of the institution. Such understanding is inevitably the product of hard and persistent effort by formal and informal leaders across the institution to open sustainable lines of communication and interaction, and to build a common vision (though rarely unanimous!).

Beyond this example of internal challenges, all universities are also shaped by external governance structures, practices, and personalities. External governance has a dramatic impact on an institution's sense of its potential and on its achievements. Changes in the competitive market of postsecondary education make timely decision-making and adaptability ever more important. State laws and policies affect approaches to institutional decision-making and public access to decision-making. Financial conditions (and stresses) also affect both the challenge and the importance of institutional capacity for making tough decisions efficiently and respectfully. Urban and metropolitan universities are not unique in the need to understand the dynamic impacts of internal and external governance, but some of the nuances of their condition and context suggest a need for distinctive strategies and approaches.

These few thoughts I offer on governance are but a slim representation of the complex issues academic organizations must consider regarding institutional governance and its evolving forms, challenges, roles, and impacts. In this issue of *Metropolitan Universities* you will discover recent works from leading higher education researchers who focus on governance. Guest Editor William Tierney, Wilbur-Kieffer Professor of Higher Education and Director in the Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis at the University of Southern California, presents a set of essays on governance that explore both internal and external issues that affect institutional decision-making, leadership, culture, and flexibility. While drawing on national perspectives on the changing landscape of governance in higher education, the articles also offer insights into the particular contexts of urban/metropolitan universities.

The authors include distinguished senior scholars in higher education research as well as emerging scholars who are shaping the future of higher education through their new perspectives. Professor Tierney is himself author of many books and articles that have informed and examined recent trends in academic organizations and cultures. For the

readers of this journal, I would particularly suggest two works with great relevance to the issues of concern to urban and metropolitan universities: *The Responsive University* (1998, The Johns Hopkins University Press), and *Building the Responsive Campus* (1999, Sage Publications). These are two essential works for leaders of urban and metropolitan universities seeking to understand changes in higher education organizations, including the growing commitment to “responsiveness” through engaged teaching and scholarship.

Collectively, the articles presented here offer an extraordinary analysis of key dimensions of governance, and diverse perspectives on future developments. In reading these articles one comes to understand that while academic governance obviously requires attention to leadership and decision-making structures, it also requires awareness of the practical and cultural contexts that shape an organization’s capacity to build a “common understanding” among its members. Professor Tierney and his colleagues offer a timely review of current key questions around shared governance in academia, and the internal and external forces that influence its form and capacity. I hope you will find these useful in advancing your own academic organizations and governance practices, and that you will engage Professor Tierney and his colleagues in further dialogue on these important issues and questions.