

# A Vision for the Future of Urban Universities

*A Festschrift in Honor of William M. Plater, Executive Vice Chancellor and Dean of the Faculties at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) from 1987 - 2006.*

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Not every institution has the good fortune to have visionary leadership in its chief academic officer, and fewer still have this leadership extend over a significant period of time. During the nineteen-year tenure of William (Bill) M. Plater as Dean of the Faculties, IUPUI was transformed from an institution known largely for its awkward set of initials to a nationally-recognized, innovative urban university. This *Festschrift* honors his work and engages his colleagues in continuing to articulate the ideas that are enabling the unique contributions that urban universities make to society.

As chief academic officer, Bill Plater recognized from the start the urban identity of IUPUI. He also saw and embraced the unique role that the urban university as an institutional type would come to play. At the countless occasions when he was asked to speak—visits from dignitaries or colleagues, national meetings, new faculty orientations, lunches for newly-tenured faculty, groundbreaking ceremonies, community events—Bill conveyed his constant belief that IUPUI would be considered “one of the great success stories in the history of modern universities” and would be, in time, “not just a world-class urban research university but a world-class global research university.” His unfailing faith and pride in being part of a new model inspired the IUPUI community to pursue the realization of his predictions.

Uniting the pieces in this special issue of *Metropolitan Universities* is the focus on the role of urban universities and the refreshing possibilities they have articulated for the future of higher education more generally. Bill Plater’s leadership across urban universities, through his roles in cross-institutional groups, national forums and publications as well as in such projects as the Urban Universities Portfolio Project, earned him the admiration and respect of many colleagues. His main interests and accomplishments were used to structure the sections of this issue and invite some of these colleagues to contribute their thoughts on the topics of liberal education, civic engagement, equity and accountability, faculty development, technology, and globalization as they relate to the urban university.

**Liberal Education.** With high enrollments of commuter students, many first-generation students, and strong professional schools, urban universities often have to champion the value of liberal learning and re-conceptualize how to engage students in

the kind of learning that will enable their success both in college and beyond. At IUPUI, Bill Plater pressed for the development of the Principles for Undergraduate Learning, an agreement on common goals across faculty and students. He invested heavily in the development of University College, which combed the country for good models of freshman seminars, learning communities, honors programs, advising, and academic support and then showed national leadership in implementing and studying these programs. As chief academic officer, he was acutely aware of the need for collaboration across the P-16 span and beyond, and across institutions, working to form partnerships with public schools and the Indiana community college system. In short, he modeled what urban universities should do.

In this issue of *Metropolitan Universities*, Bill's colleagues elaborate upon key topics on the subject of student learning. In the first piece, Robert Schoenberg, a Senior Scholar with the Association of American Colleges and Universities, raises significant questions about undergraduate education and the foundation of postsecondary learning for future generations of students in the global society of the twenty-first century, outlining some state and institutional strategies for responding to those challenges. Both he and Barbara Cambridge, President of the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning and author of the next article, talk about the importance of seeing articulation between precollegiate and postsecondary education and across institutions. Barbara Cambridge highlights the scholarship of teaching and learning and student electronic portfolios as ways of exploring and assessing learning.

**Equity and Accountability.** Long a point of access for non-traditional age students, urban universities have seen growth in numbers of students from underrepresented cultural backgrounds and difficult economic circumstances. The struggle to increase not only access but success for all students is a continuous challenge, one that IUPUI addressed during Bill Plater's tenure with diversity indicators, advocacy and support groups for students and faculty of color and women, and strategic recruiting and financial aid policies. As public institutions in the limelight, urban universities have also had to develop ways to show their progress. Bill's strong support for assessment, planning, and institutional research enabled IUPUI to have needed performance data for planning and reporting. The open sharing of data on IUPUI's performance through reports to the community and the institutional portfolio have been clear examples of his perceptions of the responsibilities of the urban university for accountability.

In the third article in this issue, Estela Bensimon, Robert Rueda, Alicia Dowd, and Frank Harris III from the Center for Urban Education at the University of Southern California Rossier School of Education closely connect equity and accountability. They describe an initiative, *Equity for All: Institutional Responsibility for Student Success*, that provides a way to transform classic approaches to accountability from description to inquiry. Working from a focus on equity, the authors show how urban universities might stimulate examination of some of the deeper assumptions that are precluding the success of all students.

**Faculty.** Although urban universities are not unique in the importance they place on the faculty and fiscal commitment they devote to them, the case of IUPUI demonstrates the particular kind of flexibility and adaptation that urban universities are called to make. Under Bill Plater's leadership, faculty appointments, rewards and development were clear priorities. He early recognized the importance of Ernest Boyer's articulation of multiple forms of scholarship in *Scholarship Reconsidered* (Boyer 1990) and embedded principles from this document, his participation in national forums, and discussions with the IUPUI faculty into an official articulation of his values in the campus guidelines for promotion and tenure, a document admired by many for its depth and innovative thinking. He championed a variety of new types of academic appointments, responding to needs for new classifications and conditions. His published essays on faculty time and the meaning of tenure are widely appreciated.

Bill Plater's recognition of the central value of faculty to a university led him to commit resources to one of the most comprehensive units in the nation for supporting faculty as teachers, researchers, and participants in civic engagement. In the next essay, Jon Wergin, from Antioch University, addresses the special challenges and unique opportunities that faculty in urban universities face, at a time when greater respect for these institutions of higher learning produces both greater expectations and greater stress on the work of the faculty.

**Civic Engagement.** One of the most powerful commitments that Bill Plater brought to his work is the emphasis on civic involvement. The strong ties of urban universities to their communities were evident to him. As Chief Academic Officer, he led efforts to partner with the community through establishing innovative academic appointment categories such as "community scholar;" through co-appointments with museum directors and other institutions; through partnerships such as the Solution Center, designed to link university and community expertise and need; and through collaboration in economic and social development initiatives. During his tenure, volunteerism and collaboration between the university and Indianapolis soared. He also promoted, through the establishment of the Center for Service and Learning, a comprehensive approach to involvement that also encompasses service learning, which has garnered national awards for its work.

As Bob Bringle, Julie Hatcher, and Barbara Holland, from the Center for Service and Learning at IUPUI, point out in the next article, there are many ways to define civic involvement, which they use as the overarching term to include civic engagement or reciprocal exchange between the community and university. Through a case study of IUPUI, they show tribute to Bill Plater when they point out that advancing the public purposes of higher education requires "the commitment, persistence, vision, and good judgment of many, but in particular the Chief Academic Officer, who assumes a pivotal responsibility for civic engagement as a fundamental aspect of faculty work and student learning."

**Technology.** One of the first national speakers to switch from slides or overhead projector to the use of digital displays, Bill Plater's early interest and appreciation for technology were key to the development of IUPUI. In guiding the design of IUPUI's library, he advocated not only emphasis on digital approaches but saw the interrelationship between information technology and other aspects of faculty work. His understanding of the importance of intellectual property led to the establishment of the Copyright Management Center and appreciation for instructional applications resulted in the establishment of one of the first Teaching and Learning Technology Roundtables in the country. He supported the development of the course management environment that was the basis for Indiana University's approach and articulated a plan for online instruction and the growth of the Community Learning Network in Indianapolis.

In the next article, scholars from other metropolitan universities—Charles Dziuban, Patsy Moskal, and Jay Brophy from the University of Central Florida and Peter Shea from the State University of New York at Albany—talk about the unique role of technology in the delivery of instruction at urban universities. They describe the characteristics of millennial students and the ways in which students across generational lines respond to technology-assisted learning. In the following article, also on technology, Darren Cambridge from George Mason University assembles a panel of four national experts to explore how technology can support the scholarship of engagement. Collectively they address questions of how technology can support community dialogue and institutional goals through partnerships using the Web as a medium for communication and collaboration.

**Globalization.** Perhaps one of the most recent activities emphasized by urban universities is the need to collaborate with partners throughout the world. As IUPUI grew and expanded, so also did Bill Plater's focus. Though continuing to advocate for close ties with the local community and for participation in state and national dialogue, he traveled extensively to sites with which IUPUI established agreements and gave emphatic support to the establishment of a strong campus office for international affairs. IUPUI's commitment to the globalization of its curriculum and student experiences as well as to economic and educational development in many international settings has been stimulated by his strong interest.

In the next article, Mitch Leventhal and Nancy Zimpher, University of Cincinnati, underscore this international commitment of urban universities, emphasizing that "the present focus of metropolitan universities is inadequate for the challenges of the twenty-first century." They argue that urban universities must adopt an approach that is "global, enterprise-wide, entrepreneurial, and focused on research excellence, curricular innovation, and economic fundamentals."

In the final article, one of IUPUI's partners, Juree Vichit-Vadaken of the National Institute of Development Administration in Bangkok, discusses the unique characteristics of urban universities from a global perspective, discussing the model of the western "university" from the viewpoint of a non-Western person. As a fitting conclusion to the multiple facets of the American model of urban universities, she

argues that, while shaping the dynamic of change, urban universities need to hold on to some specific basic roles and traditions.

## **The Future**

The six organizing sections of this issue, while not an exhaustive set of categories describing the focus of urban universities, are indicative of both the scope of Bill Plater's work and thinking as Dean of the Faculties at IUPUI and the major contributions and concerns of his colleagues. All of these authors detail in their own words the importance of the urban university in a global society. They offer an analysis of the issues and challenges as well as recommendations for future vision.

This vision is characterized by several key attributes:

- An extraordinary belief in the potential of urban universities
- Attraction to innovation
- Commitment to service
- Belief in the benefits of diversity and social justice
- Affirmation of liberal education and strong professional preparation
- Support for student and faculty success
- Value on intentionality, reflection, and informed choices
- Reliance on collaboration
- Dedication to social and economic development

In his current work in international educational development, Bill Plater continues to contribute to this vision. This journal issue is a testimony to the many ways in which he has already helped IUPUI and higher education in general to accomplish strategic advances and a token of appreciation for the continuing vision that he and his colleagues bring to the urban university.

## **References**

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## **Author Information**

As colleagues at Indiana University Purdue-University Indianapolis (IUPUI), Nancy Chism, Sharon J. Hamilton, Scott Evenbeck and Susan Sutton each worked directly with Bill Plater over the course of their long careers on topics that include: redefining faculty roles and responsibilities and enhancing faculty life, implementing principles for an undergraduate education that meet the needs of a global society, institutionalizing support for a successful and diverse student body, and internationalizing IUPUI's curriculum, faculty, and students.

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