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This article examines the concept of student involvement at metropolitan universities. Based on the College Experiences Study, this report discusses the influences of institutional history, student affairs staff experiences, and the multiple role commitments of metropolitan university students on student involvement in experiences outside the classroom. Suggestions and recommendations for enhancing these experiences are offered.

Students at Metropolitan Universities

Viewing Involvement through Different Lenses

The release of the report *Involvement in Learning* in 1984 by the National Institute of Education rekindled interest in developing various ways of increasing the involvement of college students in their collegiate experiences (i.e., studying, working at on-campus jobs, participating in student organizations, and interacting frequently with their peers and members of the faculty). In his book, *Achieving Educational Excellence* (see Suggested Readings), Alexander Astin postulated that students learn by becoming involved, and others have asserted that living on campus promoted student growth and development in out-of-class experiences.

The concept of involvement is defined by Astin as "...the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience." (p. 134) He described a highly involved student as one who "...devotes considerable energy to studying, spends a lot of time on campus, participates actively in student organizations, and interacts frequently with faculty members and other students." (p. 134) This definition and characterization, in many ways, describes the life of a traditional-age college student actively engaged in learning, both inside and outside the classroom, on a residential campus.

What about students who attend metropolitan universities? They are likely to live at home, commute to the campus, may be married and/or have a family, and in general, lead a very different life from

their counterparts on residential campuses. Students who attend metropolitan universities are a very diverse group. Indeed, one model was developed that identified 256 categories of commuter students who could be found on any given commuter campus, based on such factors as age, gender, ability, income, educational plans, remedial problems, etc. It is dangerous to make blanket statements about the students who attend any institution of higher education, but certainly the case can be made that the students who attend metropolitan universities are more diverse than those of traditional age who attend residential institutions.

The concept of involvement, as identified earlier in this article, asserts that students learn by being involved. How does this concept apply to the student at the metropolitan, commuter campus? What can student affairs staff do to promote student involvement on urban campuses? The purpose of this paper is to discuss student involvement in out-of-class experiences on urban campuses. The analogy of the shopping center is used to describe student experiences at metropolitan universities. Implications and recommendations for practice conclude the paper. Examples are drawn from the College Experiences Study.

The College Experiences Study

Conducted during the 1988–1989 academic year, the College Experiences Study sought to identify institutional factors and conditions that promote student involvement in out-of-class experiences that complement the educational purposes of the institution.

Data sources. Fourteen institutions that make special efforts to involve students were identified with the assistance of forty-eight higher education scholars, such as Alexander Astin, Zelda Gamson, David Riesman, C. Robert Pace, and Warren Bryan Martin, officials of higher education associations, representatives/leaders of regional accreditation associations, selected college and university presidents, and former presidents of the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) and American College Personnel Association (ACPA). The metropolitan institutions that were included in the study of “involving colleges” were The University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB), the University of North Carolina at Charlotte (UNCC), the University of Louisville (UofL), and Wichita State University (WSU). Information was gathered from a variety of data sources, including documents, observations, and individual and group interviews with approximately thirteen hundred students, faculty, administrators, trustees, and others, such as librarians and campus historians.

Synopsis of factors common to involving colleges. In order to provide a framework for this discussion of metropolitan institutions, a brief overview is offered of the five categories of factors that are shared to varying degrees by all the institutions in the study regardless of their setting or mission. These factors do not work independently of one another, and cannot be taken outside the context of an institution’s mission and purpose. They should not be separated or isolated, al-

though we have done so for the purposes of clarification and understanding. The five categories are:

- a clear, coherent mission and philosophy that communicate high but reasonable challenges for students and that are buttressed by an ethic of care. These institutions deliberately accentuate or minimize interpersonal distinctions to support the institution's purpose. In addition, these colleges communicate a clear commitment to create a culturally pluralistic campus community;
- campus environments that use the physical setting of the campus (urban, rural, or near a city) to educational advantage, that create a human-scale environment where anonymity is discouraged, and that offer numerous opportunities for involvement in out-of-class experiences;
- a variety of cultural artifacts (symbols of institutional culture, such as ceremonies, stories, language, and legends) that promote involvement through a theory of membership (everyone is a full partner and owner of the college) and communicates to students "how the institution operates";
- policies and practices that hold students responsible for their behavior and learning, and blur the artificial boundaries between in-class and out-of-class learning, distribute resources consistently with the institution's educational purposes, and enable subcommunities of students to flourish; and
- institutional agents who promote students' involvement in out-of-class experiences that are educationally purposeful.

A Metropolitan Analogy

We offer an analogy to describe the nature of out-of-class experiences for students at metropolitan institutions. This analogy can be helpful in understanding campus life at these institutions. It probably applies to any metropolitan institution that has a high-level commitment to encouraging a strong relationship between out-of-class experiences and a high-quality undergraduate experience.

The Shopping Center

The shopping center, which is located in urban areas, is usually comprised of a number of specialty stores surrounding one or more department stores called anchor stores. Acres of parking surround the shopping center that often is located away from what had been the main, downtown shopping district. One of the features of the shopping center is that the consumer can drive to the shopping center and not have to leave it for an entire day. In addition to the stores that are located in the center, there are fast-food outlets, movie theaters, and other forms of entertainment located in the shopping center or the surrounding area; the entire center is a virtual cornucopia of things to do.

One of the drawbacks of the shopping center, however, is that

while many people are attracted to it, there is an impersonal nature to the experience. It is unlikely that the customers know the merchants. Indeed, many of the stores, including the speciality shops, are part of a larger chain of stores across the country with local management; stores may well be owned by an international conglomerate. This is a dramatic difference from the family-run, locally owned store, where customers are known by name.

Besides the impersonal nature of the consumer-merchant relationship, the odds are less that the shopper will run into neighbors at the shopping center than at a locally owned store. Regional shopping malls attract a number of people from great distances. So while the shopping center may be full of people, the potential for visiting with fellow shoppers is reduced, because they are unlikely to know each other. In short, the environment in the shopping mall is simply not one where there is much interaction among shoppers.

The shopping center analogy is intended to emphasize the context in which metropolitan institutions must operate, particularly in comparison with geographically isolated institutions. The university's commitment to the city and to students of all ages and socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds suggests that the metropolitan institutions strive to be nearly all things to all people. Students can come to the campus at almost any time during the day or early evening, find a course, and receive help from a faculty member or student life administrator. This service orientation, which is a strength of metropolitan institutions, also is a weakness. People can come and go so freely that it is difficult for the institution to develop traditions, bonds with students, and a sense of belonging.

Conditions that Influence Student Involvement at Metropolitan Universities

We identified three conditions that were inherent in the metropolitan universities we visited that influence student involvement. These conditions are identified and discussed in the next section of this article.

History. These four institutions have short histories and, as a result, few long-standing traditions. UNCC and UAB are products of the expansion of higher education in their states following World War II. WSU and UofL were established many decades ago, but each took its present form in the past twenty-five years. While they have a long tradition of providing service to their metropolitan areas, they have been designated as their state's "urban institution" with a concomitant special mission for a relatively short period of time.

In several cases (UAB and UofL), the history of the student affairs division is even shorter than that of the university. The first vice president for student affairs was hired at UAB in the late 1970s, and UofL appointed its first chief student affairs officer as a result of a regional accreditation report in the 1970s. As youthful as these institutions are, the student affairs divisions, in some cases, are even younger.

Events, ceremonies, and special occasions that contribute to the culture of an institution with a long history (see Suggested Readings, Kuh et al.) are not a significant part of the culture of the urban institutions that we visited, at least by comparison with the large, residential institutions we studied: Miami University, Iowa State University, Stanford University, and the University of California–Davis. Stories, myths, and sagas that can contribute so much to the culture of institutions of higher education are hard to find on campuses with only a twenty to thirty-year history. Involving students in activities, ceremonies, or other events that celebrate the history and culture of an institution is especially difficult when virtually every event seems brand new.

Student affairs staff experiences. One of the problems inherent to metropolitan institutions is that their faculty and student affairs staff tend to compare student life to their own experiences, which frequently occurred at residential, research universities. Student affairs staff, in particular, tend to earn their graduate degrees at residential institutions that provide graduate assistant experiences working with traditional students. Many of the leading student affairs graduate preparation programs, such as those at Indiana University, University of Virginia, University of Vermont, Bowling Green State University, and Michigan State University, are located at very traditional institutions that have large percentages of traditional-age students who live on or near campus. To be successful in student affairs work at a metropolitan university requires that student affairs staff view students differently from the way they did when they received their graduate education at a very traditional campus. Suggestions for student affairs staff are included in the final section of this report.

Problems arise when faculty and staff compare student life to their own (residential) experiences.

Multiple role commitments. The students we interviewed from the metropolitan institutions handled many role commitments simultaneously, including spouse, parent, full-time employment, and so on. One surmises that for many of these people being a student may not be as central to their lives as it is for traditional-age, residential students. The time that commuting students have available to them for campus involvement is limited. As a result, it is probably unrealistic to expect them to participate as fully in campus activities and other learning experiences outside the classroom as their colleagues do at traditional, residential colleges. Indeed, Barbara Jacoby (see Suggested Readings) observed that "...commuters select their campus involvements carefully." (p. 63)

Implications for Practice

The final portion of this article deals with recommendations for practice, based on examples from the institutions that were a part of this study.

Community relationships. We believe that colleges that involve students take advantage of their setting. The settings in which the met-

ropolitan institutions are located provide unique opportunities for student affairs administrators and students to develop learning opportunities outside the classroom. The metropolitan institution, in the best set of circumstances, can view the entire urban area as having potential learning opportunities for students. The critical task for the institution is to develop relationships with the business, cultural, and recreational aspects of the community so as to realize this potential. Several examples follow that illustrate how this can be done.

At each of the campuses we visited, we were told by the chief executive officer and others that relationships with the local community were very important. To varying degrees, the mission of each of the universities is to provide service and assistance to the surrounding community. President Donald Swain of the University of Louisville, for example, personally has nurtured relationships with government, business, and industry, as well as civic groups in the city of Louisville and the surrounding metropolitan areas.

Service and assistance were manifested in many ways. At Wichita State, that could mean anything from holding the city's annual July 4th celebration on campus, to providing the site for the local Black Arts Festival. At UAB and UofL, outreach from the medical programs is an important service to the community.

UNCC tries to develop relationships with the local business community through economic development and government.

The relationship that metropolitan institutions have with the metropolitan area that they serve has several implications for out-of-class student experiences. Urban areas frequently have the advantage of providing rich, cultural experiences for their citizens, including ballet companies, symphony orchestras, libraries, museums, and other cultural resources that help enrich the lives of the citizenry. Through strengthened relationships with the community, urban campuses should ensure that students can take advantage of these opportunities. How this is accomplished varies from place to place. Assistance with transportation to cultural events and providing discounted ticket prices for students are ways that community resources can be used to enrich student life. At Wichita State, for example, tickets to the Wichita Symphony, which includes a substantial number of WSU music students and faculty, are available to students without charge the day of the event.

In turn, the campus can provide wonderful resources for the community. Just one example is the National Youth Sports Program (NYSP) summer camps sponsored by the National College Athletic Association (NCAA) for economically disadvantaged youth aged ten to sixteen. This program has been offered at the University of Louisville and Wichita State. Obvious benefits accrue to youth who participate in NYSP, since they develop a number of recreational skills and the program also provides benefits for university students who serve as counselors and instructors. For the instructors and counselors, the NYSP is an excellent opportunity to develop their skills in working with young people. Many of them go on to seek careers in teaching, counseling, or coaching.

Work was the most common experience of metropolitan university students interviewed.

Work. In general, work, whether a part of the institution's cooperative education or internship experiences, or other forms of employment, was the most common experience of students who attended metropolitan universities we visited. Typically, more than 60 percent of the students we interviewed worked thirty or more hours per week. For many students, employment experience was extremely valuable and constituted perhaps the most powerful undergraduate learning experience outside the classroom.

Each of these institutions was heavily committed to cooperative education. At Wichita State, for example, over nine hundred students participated in co-op experiences during 1988–1989. Other programs were available, as well, that were designed to help students take advantage of their work opportunities.

UNCC has developed a program entitled Service Learning Internships. These are designed to provide an excellent learning opportunity for students, while meeting the needs of the community. The program is another example of how symbiotic relationships can be developed between the metropolitan university and the urban area. Interns work at such places as community centers, environmental action programs, municipal and county offices, social service organizations, the United Way, and the court system. Students must work up to 120 hours for three credits, or 240 hours for six credits. Some of the internships are paid, while the others are not. To complete the program successfully, the student must submit a report

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to a supervising faculty member. Approximately sixty students participated in the 1988–1989 academic year.

Part-time employment for students is an experience that has the potential to be enriched. We encountered many students who had secured part-time employment that complemented their curricular plans or occupational objectives. Finance students worked in banks, accounting students were affiliated with accounting firms and other businesses, fine arts students performed with symphony orchestras or worked in galleries. On the other hand, we encountered some students who worked night jobs because the pay was attractive, and we learned that still other students had taken certain jobs without thinking about how their employment would relate to their curricular or occupational plans.

Metropolitan universities can do much to encourage students to seek employment that is complementary to their education. That can be done, in part, through campus employment offices. Institutions should be committed to developing part-time jobs in the community to help meet student needs that go beyond the paycheck. Efforts need to be undertaken to help students turn their part-time jobs into learning experiences, such as Wichita State's newly initiated program of providing a periodic newsletter to all students about how to maximize the learning opportunities provided by their part-time work. Faculty advisors also can be helpful to students by encouraging them to find part-time work that is related to their major and/or occupational plans. At times,

we encountered students who were so focused on their part-time work that their learning suffered. We think that enhancing learning from the work experience requires more attention and further development.

Less well developed, unfortunately, was how the experiences of returning adult learners were related to their educational objectives, or how these students might play a slightly different role to enrich campus life. The metropolitan universities we visited did not present specific programs designed to relate these students' experiences to their educational objectives. Perhaps a volunteer bureau could be developed to make the services of these students available to the community or a mentoring program might be initiated using these more experienced students as mentors to traditional-age college students on campus or high school students in the community. Returning adult students are a tremendous resource. Their experiences have not been utilized well by metropolitan universities.

Communications. One of the problems faced at urban campuses is to communicate to students about the various opportunities that are available to them on and off campus. Students are on campus for relatively short periods of time, and some of the mechanisms that were found at other involving colleges (utilizing the centralized campus post office at Grinnell, table tents in the dining facilities in the residence halls at Iowa State, or the many kiosks at the University of California-Davis) to publicize events and encourage students to participate in out-of-class experiences are not appropriate for large metropolitan campuses. For example, the student newspaper is published only a few times, or perhaps only once, each week. When asked about the frequency of his publication, the editor of the *Louisville Cardinal* (the University of Louisville's student newspaper) indicated that he could not compete with the *Louisville Courier-Journal* and did not want to carry news that was not campus-related. As a result, his paper is published only once each week.

Other mechanisms were found, however, that facilitate communications among students, and between students and the institution. At UNCC a newsletter is published periodically to inform commuter students of campus events. Similarly, the University of Louisville publishes a commuter student newsletter. UAB uses an electronic message board outside its student center to publicize campus events. Wichita State has access to a channel on the local cable television system, which it uses to bring news of campus life and other events to the entire community. Not only does this enable students with cable television to get news of campus events, it also provides a link between the campus and the Wichita community.

Scheduling. On traditional campuses, the typical day is structured so that classes meet in the mornings and early afternoons, and activities, such as speakers or movies, tend to be scheduled in the late afternoons and early evenings. On the metropolitan campus, this model will not work, because these campuses offer a full schedule of classes in the late afternoon and evening to accommodate the schedules of learners who have other commitments during the day, such as work. On the metropolitan campus, scheduling events in the evening automatically

will eliminate a substantial proportion of the student body from being able to attend. Moreover, even traditional day students on a commuter campus will not return to campus for events scheduled after the students have left for the day.

Picking the same time of day for each speech in a lecture series probably will eliminate a number of students from being able to attend. Events should be scheduled at different times of day throughout the semester. If the institution has access to a television station, either through the urban area's cable system, public access channels, or perhaps the public broadcasting service, speeches and other presentations might be videotaped and replayed on television. One other option is that the event is taped and copies are made available for students to view on their own videocassette recorders or through equipment at the university.

The University of North Carolina at Charlotte had an interesting approach to scheduling events. The university set aside a period of time around the noon hour on Tuesday and Thursday each week for club meetings, symposia, and other events. No classes were scheduled during this time period. While this time would not necessarily meet the needs of evening learners, it did provide a period when commuting students could participate fully in learning opportunities outside normally scheduled classes.

Challenge and support. As was mentioned earlier in this article, institutions that encourage students to be involved in out-of-class experiences that are educationally meaningful challenge their students, but simultaneously provide support and encouragement for them. Some of the support mechanisms we found at the metropolitan universities were especially interesting.

The University of Louisville developed the Tender Loving Care (TLC) program to communicate the message to students that they matter and that the university cares about them. Among the elements of the program are welcome stations and welcome houses during orientation, painted sidewalks to direct students to important destinations, funding for faculty who wish to plan programs outside of the classroom for students, and stations where coffee and cookies are available to students during examination periods, as students move from one location to another.

At UAB, the Honors Program was initiated to bring approximately ninety students together with faculty in an intensive interdisciplinary program. The program provides a sense of community and belonging to students who, for the most part, commute to the campus. The UAB Honors Program is an example of how a metropolitan institution can create a human-scale environment for some of its students.

UNCC is very concerned about developing the leadership skills of its students. Several hundred students participate in one of the four leadership development programs offered at UNCC, including classes, retreats, and workshops. Civic and business leaders from Charlotte are frequent presenters at these programs.

WSU offers a special seminar for returning adult students, i.e., those who have not been enrolled at a college or university for several

years. This credit course is designed to introduce the university to these students and make them feel welcomed and valued by the university. WSU wants these students to fit into the mainstream of campus life. Approximately sixty students enroll in this course each year.

Family involvement. One last area in the development of learning activities outside the classroom deserves comment. On the traditional campus, most of the traditional-age undergraduate students are not married and do not have children. At metropolitan institutions, many of the students have families, and that point should be considered as programs are developed. Members of a student's family ought to be welcome at all kinds of institutional events (sporting, cultural, etc.), and if an admission charge is assessed, discount rates ought to apply to members of the student's family. There is a substantial body of literature that describes the kind of support that adult learners need to be successful (see Suggested Readings, K. Patricia Cross), and providing opportunities for the entire family to participate in campus events will be very helpful in building a base of support for these students.

Beyond admission to campus events, other programs can be constructed specifically for family members. Wichita State offers an orientation program for members of new students' families and provides classes in swimming, gymnastics, and other recreational activities for the children of students, for example. For a number of years, WSU offered a course specifically for parents of entering, traditional-age students. Enrollment in this course allowed parents to use all campus services and resources and entitled them to admission to all university functions at student rates, if there was an admission charge.

Often, campuses have a special weekend in the fall for parents of students. At the metropolitan university, this weekend should include the entire family of students, and instead of being called "Parents' Weekend," it should be titled "Family Weekend" to underscore the institution's commitment to including the entire family in its activities.

Conclusion

Involvement in out-of-class learning experiences has been seen as a means of improving the overall educational experiences of college students and has been emphasized in recent literature. Metropolitan universities have as much of an obligation to encourage student involvement as do residential institutions. But metropolitan institutions have a much more difficult task, due to the heterogeneous nature and diverse educational objectives of the student body.

Those responsible for developing learning opportunities outside the classroom at metropolitan universities need to view student experiences differently from the way these experiences are viewed on residential campuses. By making better use of the work experiences of students, using a wider variety of communications mechanisms, including the students' families in many activities, employing creative scheduling, and most of all, developing linkages with the community, the out-of-class experiences of students can be rich. To provide any-

thing less than this would be to deny these students an essential ingredient in their total college experience.

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