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The Importance of Changing Our Universities through COPC Projects

Many universities define their missions in terms of involvement in their communities, with all that it implies in terms of economic, political, and social partnerships and the emphasis on applied research and professional service. I promoted the creation of a new college at Arizona State University, the College of Public Programs, now a COPC grantee, largely in pursuit of that vision, and I am proud of the college as it exists today. Later, as president of Wright State University, I redefined that institution as a metropolitan university and worked with many similarly minded presidents around the country to establish the model firmly in the public mind. I am proud that the metropolitan movement has grown and that this journal has proven successful.

I developed my point of view for several reasons:

1. I thought early in my administrative career, and I think now, it is the right thing to do. I tried to be guided in making most decisions by Father Ted Hesburgh's dictum, paraphrased, "When faced with a difficult decision, simply do the right thing; not the expedient thing, not the popular thing, not necessarily the moral thing (since most decisions do not boil down to a moral question), the right thing—and you'll almost always know what

that is." And we do know that the application of our many professional skills to pressing urban problems is the right thing to do. More than 80% of our people live in cities, and the social, economic, and political problems that arise from population concentrations have grown along with population densities. Few can disagree with Derek Bok, who spent much of his final year as President of Harvard, speaking out on the necessity of university involvement with the pressing urban problems of inadequate health care, declining public education, increasing crime, and ineffective political responses.

2. In the 1970s the golden age of expansion of higher education was waning, and increasing numbers of constituents—parents, students, business and government leaders—were demanding that universities "earn" their public support with more direct constituent service, be it in teaching, applied research, or professional service. "Business as usual," as practiced by the historically dominant institutions, seemed less acceptable in the new environment, and I believed that newer or less prestigious institutions might more easily and quickly reach their institutional goals by defining a mission responsive to the public interest. So—best of all worlds—an institution might do well by doing good!

3. New or expanded programs might gain both public and private support if targeted to definable community interests. The Arizona State Engineering Excellence program and ASU West are prime examples. Carefully cultivated community and business support ultimately produced rather generous public support for both of these initiatives that overwhelmed suspicion by the Arizona Regents and naysayers in the faculty. Private donors—the lifeblood of private institutions—have always responded to university needs related to the community's welfare. As examples, we need only to look at the success of medical schools and hospitals. I have always thought private donors would be less interested in "bricks and mortar" if we gave them more choices of practical, real-world programs or research from which they could actually see a payoff.

There have been and always will be naysayers to this movement. Many faculty members, particularly in the traditional arts and sciences disciplines, have been unable to discover anything for themselves in community interactions. Established institutions consider their positions secure, and, therefore, see little reason to change. While local political leaders have normally been enthusiastic, some state officials have initially been skeptical. In fact, I will never forget one of my early budget presentations to the Arizona Senate Appropriations Committee. Our strategy was to use the metropolitan "hook" to gain legislative support for funding that would help equalize the support levels of ASU and the University of Arizona. After all, a clear majority in the legislature represent Maricopa County. After an impassioned statement of our case, a local senator spoke up: "Mr. Provost, aren't you just trying to make ASU into a big community college?" After bristling, I delivered some pedantic and pretty meaningless denial. It only occurred to me later that he had given me an opening to deliver the perfect answer: "Yes, Senator, if ASU could mobilize its teaching and research resources at the advance, and graduate levels to deliver responsive services as effectively as the Maricopa Community College District does at its level, I would consider that to be success indeed." Community col-

lege leaders discovered the value of responsive programming long ago and have ridden that discovery to a degree of public support in many states that should be the envy of the university system. This does not mean universities will be like community colleges—unless you mean *successful* like them.

The federal government has shown an appreciation for university/community partnerships for many years. The Department of Education and its predecessors have conceived and financed countless "demonstration projects" intended to promote the use of university resources to improve local public schools and to increase the university's willingness to be involved as our public schools declined across the country. Most of these efforts failed, in the sense that they seldom outlived their direct federal funding support and rarely got replicated in a district beyond the "demonstration." This outcome was not entirely the federal government's fault. In almost all cases the stated goal of the grant program was to benefit the service recipient, not primarily to promote institutional change in the college or university delivering the service. Federal grant managers frequently talked about the desirability of institutional change, and grant terms sometimes required gradual increases in institutional funds intended to provide for the program's continuance after the grant ended. However, these terms did not work well—and were usually ignored or avoided—and at best they attempted only to guarantee program continuance as opposed to a changed institutional concept or attitude regarding the value of community partnerships in general and the centrality of such activities in the institution's mission.

This background information puts my remarks regarding COPC into context. HUD's primary goal is improving life in our urban centers, and building improved neighborhoods certainly ranks high as a means of accomplishing that goal. COPC grants provide support for using university expertise to build infrastructure and deliver services to improve troubled neighborhoods. I believe the results in the affected neighborhoods will be positive. A short-term evaluation of the COPC program appears quite favorable; after all, good deeds are happening that will be of real value to real people in the target neighborhoods. However, there is minimal evidence thus far that the COPC grant program is working seriously toward institutional change in the larger sense and almost no likelihood under the current terms that even the most successful programs will be widely replicated. The longer-term evaluation is much less certain. The federal government shows few signs that it intends to continue programs such as COPC indefinitely, and the target "demonstration" neighborhoods are pitifully few in terms of need. Unless true institutional change occurs, most of the programs will be only a memory in a few years.

As academics or government officials sincerely interested in these efforts—and sincerely committed to using your skills to address community needs—you bear some responsibility for trying to improve the long-term prognosis. And, there may still be time to do so. You can use your influence to promote longer-term as opposed to short-term outcomes.

First, discuss your work, and promote it to academic administrators, peers, and other constituents as an example of a successful concept, not as a specific set of actions related to a time-limited grant. Discuss the applicability of community partnership across the university, as a means of supporting larger university goals.

Second, put pressure on administrators to invest real university resources in your COPC project and to increase them annually.

Third, try to force a commitment to continuing the funds for projects as yet undefined.

Fourth and most important, insist that those working on the project be fully trained people, preferably regular faculty, who can be counted on to produce high quality outcomes on the COPC project. A good deal of experience suggests that the project will reach its goals if regular faculty members are actively engaged. The outcome is less certain, or even questionable, if it is turned over to temporary administrators hired for the purpose and graduate students with little stake in the outcome beyond their continued stipend. It is only by producing high quality outcomes that you will succeed.

Finally, demand a responsive reward system within the university. During the past decade, great progress, at least in many institutions, has been made at properly rewarding applied research and professional service. Many claims to the contrary are greatly exaggerated, but problems still persist, and nowhere more strongly than in the established prestigious institutions—even some recipients of COPC grants.

Given the widespread agreement that the university has a critical role in solving the nation's urban problems, why do so many faculty members believe that promotion and tenure committees and/or reviewing administrators refuse to recognize professional service and reward it properly? I believe there are three reasons:

1. How well to we present the case? Professional service is unlikely to be rewarded if it is simply listed or catalogued quantitatively. Traditional research or teaching would not be rewarded if similarly presented, yet we have somehow not yet learned to document our professional work qualitatively in an effective way. I cannot add anything on this subject to the writings of Ernest Lynton, Commonwealth Professor at the University of Massachusetts, who has published extensively on professional service and community partnerships. Ernest is a physicist, scarcely a representative of a nontraditional "soft" discipline. His article in the second issue of the *Journal of Public Service and Outreach* states the case succinctly. Unless professional service outcomes are documented as rigorously as research or teaching outcomes, the skeptics will continue to have no difficulty in denying legitimate rewards.

2 . Why do many faculty perceive that rewards for service may be denied? This involves confusion within the professoriate itself. Professional service, the application of one's professional skills to important public problems, must be carefully separated from discussions of other service activities. When this is done, committees and administrators can easily justify adequate rewards, but not if competing faculty members who have served on a dozen meaningless committees or with distinction as a deacon, civic club officer, or little league coach, demand equal reward. The definition of service cannot be compromised.

3. The other confusion is one many practitioners themselves prefer not to consider. Universities can reward professional service in two ways, both completely appropriate. One way is by explicitly allowing—even encouraging—faculty to use up one day per week "consulting" in the community for remuneration. I know of no other employer that grants so generous a reward. Few institutions even ask how

much one is paid, much less make any effort to limit the amount one can earn within the allowable time. The other reward comes in merit salary increases, granted for distinguished professional service performed as part of one's regular duties. Both types of rewards are appropriate, but faculty frequently expect merit salary reward for professional service activity already paid for by overload or consulting dollars. Neither faculty colleagues nor administrators will respond sympathetically to such demands—nor should they. I am not suggesting that either type of activity is superior to the other, only that an expectation of double reward is unrealistic.

High quality outcomes from your COPC grant can be your best argument for changing the system. Using your professional skills to solve important community problems is important work. If the solution works in your community, it very likely has broader, even national or international, applicability. Your work will be publishable in journals such as *Metropolitan Universities*. No sensible faculty committee or administrator can argue today that such activities do not represent the very best in faculty productivity.

HUD and its staff also bear some responsibility for promoting institutional change. Short-term success is not good enough, and HUD can help ensure a better longer-term outcome. HUD's site visits should be tough and candid, and its expectations should be clear to institutional decision-makers. After all, HUD represents the people whose money supports the program. We taxpayers are entitled to know the answers to questions many do not want to hear:

1. What is the institution really doing to support the faculty involved in COPC? Will they be rewarded? Ask for specific examples.

2. What kind of financial support is the institution providing? How much hard money—any? Or is it only release time and waived overhead? (Even scholarships are at the margin.) Has hard money support increased as the grant years go by? Why not?

3. Does the university have a continuing commitment to grant personnel? Why not? How many real faculty are engaged in the work?

4. Is there a commitment to continuing funds beyond the grant? Why not?

5. Are there plans to replicate the work in other neighborhoods when the grant ends? Why not?

I recognize that grant terms do not necessarily require the institutions to answer these questions. However, HUD's interest in such questions can still provide support to the faculty who are working against the odds to lead their institutions toward significant institutional change that will produce truly meaningful long-term outcomes. If administrators recognize HUD's interest in these questions, and particularly if they see critical references in site visit reports, they will not be so quick to dismiss faculty efforts to "do the right thing."

The seeds of change do exist within our colleges and universities. COPC gives HUD an opportunity to nurture those seeds and contribute to their growth. We frequently take business to task for is emphasis on short-term quarterly results. Surely long-term institutional change in our universities to value and continue COPC-type work is as important as any short-term relief COPC programs provide to targeted neighborhoods.

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