

The Metropolitan University of the 21st Century: Building Bridges to Regional Stewardship

James C. Votruba and Nancy L. Zimpher

As co-hosts of the 14th Annual Conference of the Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities, we chose a theme that very deliberately reflected the fact that for the first time in the organization's history two universities had joined hands within a large metropolitan region to co-plan and co-present the conference. Our theme, "The Metropolitan University of the 21st Century: Building Bridges to Regional Stewardship," reflects not only the reality that our two institutions – Northern Kentucky University (NKU) and the University of Cincinnati (UC) – have established a strong working relationship while jointly addressing significant challenges facing our community, but also that our world has grown increasingly metropolitan. We are, as the Brookings Institution so aptly stated in its Blueprint for American Prosperity, a "MetroNation."

The location for our gathering, just across the Ohio River from the Cincinnati skyline in the middle of a metropolitan region that encompasses fifteen counties in three states and the nation's twenty-fourth largest metropolitan population (more than 2.1 million), provided a thought-provoking setting to explore the ways in which urban and metropolitan universities drive both social and economic progress in their metropolitan areas.

From the early stages of our discussions as co-hosts, we agreed that the Brookings Blueprint for American Prosperity and its MetroNation report provided us with timely overviews on which to build. As the Metropolitan Policy Program argues in the MetroNation report, "The ability of our nation to grow and prosper and meet the social and environmental challenges of our time depends heavily on the health and vitality of our metropolitan areas" (Metropolitan Policy Program 2007, 5).

While it remains to be seen if the MetroNation report will have a catalytic impact on U.S. federal policies as a new president begins his term, the data it outlines clearly makes the case that:

- The top one hundred metro areas in the United States generate 75 percent of the Gross Domestic Product.
- Metro areas in the United States are home to eight in ten Americans and jobs.
- More than half of the world's total population lives in metropolitan areas.
- Metro regions serve as labor markets, with 94 percent of workers residing in the one hundred largest metro areas in the United States commuting to jobs within their own metro area.

To examine these themes, the conference featured three keynote presenters, two panel discussions, more than forty concurrent sessions, a private institution members' breakfast meeting, and a provosts-only session to bring together the next group of CUMU leaders. The more than 230 attendees came from over seventy institutions across the United States and around the world. Among the highlights from the featured presentations were:

- Stephen Crawford, Deputy Director, Metropolitan Policy Program, Brookings Institution, who discussed the need for state economic development policies to be holistic and focus on key assets that drive growth in cities and the metro areas where those assets are concentrated. While the U.S. is a "MetroNation," he argued that government policies, both at the state and national levels, do not seem to reflect this reality.
- Mildred Garcia, President, California State University, Dominguez Hills, who examined the role of class, race, and ethnicity and how urban and metropolitan postsecondary institutions must remain cognizant of such dimensions of difference when building relationships and partnerships in the community and region.
- Paul Grogan, founder of CEOs for Cities, CEO and President of the Boston Foundation, and co-author of *Comeback Cities*, who focused on universities as anchor institutions in a shifting economy. Using Boston as a case study, he shared examples of creative partnerships in which universities have collaborated with other anchor institutions to advance critical public policy issues affecting the region's competitiveness.

In addition, the two plenary panel discussions proved thought-provoking and timely:

Regional Planning and the Role of Universities — As co-hosting presidents, we brought together leaders from Northern Kentucky's Vision 2015 and Greater Cincinnati's Agenda 360 planning initiatives to discuss the need for a region-wide approach to planning. Great cities and great metro areas aren't created purely by chance; they take thoughtful and comprehensive planning.

The Presidential Election and Higher Education — Just two weeks prior to Election Day, four journalists discussed the implications of the U.S. presidential race on colleges and universities. Moderator Mike Philipps, president and CEO of the Scripps Howard Foundation, kept the conversation on task as Cincinnati's *Business Courier* editor Rob Daumeyer, *Inside Higher Ed* editor Scott Jaschik, *The New York Times* "Bits" (tag: Online Politics) editor Kate Phillips, and *The Chronicle Review* senior editor Karen Winkler speculated about the outcome of the Obama-Biden vs. McCain-Palin election. One striking concept presented is that it was irrelevant what candidates had promised in their campaign rhetoric, as post-election realities would determine what really happens.

Key Conference Papers

Our lead paper provides an excellent overview of colleges and universities and their role in metropolitan areas as “Anchor Institutions in a Shifting Economy.” Paul S. Grogan, CEO and President of the Boston Foundation and founder of CEOs for Cities, discusses how the relationship between higher education institutions and their home communities, historically often one of mistrust and animosity, has improved in recent years. Contributing to this realignment has been the well-documented economic impact of colleges and universities in their communities, but Grogan examines three other factors: the regional economic benefits of a highly educated workforce, the void in civic leadership left by the departure of large corporations as they consolidate and move, and the revival of some cities. Grogan draws on a number of examples from the Boston metropolitan region, including the Boston Indicators Project, Harvard’s Bridge to Learning program, some university initiatives in restructuring urban public education, and The Boston Life Sciences Collaborative.

“Creating Belonging in a Liberal Arts Environment: Tools of Community Engagement and Connection from a Professor and Two Students” shifts the discussion to a small liberal arts college and shares the experiences of the 2008 recipient of the Ernest A. Lynton Award for the Scholarship of Engagement. Connecticut College is somewhat set apart, yet within walking distance or a short drive, from the urban communities that surround it. Three women of color – Associate Professor Michelle Dunlap and students Penney Jade Beaubrun and Christina Burrell, all of Africana heritage – discuss the role that community engagement plays in their teaching, research, and service experiences and how that engagement has assisted in their coping with and gaining a sense of belonging in a predominantly white liberal arts college environment.

A two-year, community-based, learning program at a major public research university provides a bridge between two areas traditionally seen as separate – advocacy and creating knowledge. In “Situated University, Situated Writing,” Ann M. Feldman of the University of Illinois at Chicago, recognized with a Citation in Distinguished Engaged Scholarship in the competition for the 2008 Lynton Award for Faculty Professional Service and Academic Outreach, outlines the Chicago Civic Leadership Certificate Program and the support it provides to community partners that do not have the resources to initiate or implement important community or research projects on their own. The author argues that “writing, or discourse, can now be seen as critical and consequential in framing a situation, rather than merely as ‘writing it up,’ or the final step in a research project.”

A regional public university with a metropolitan mission discusses the decision to locate its business school in downtown Spartanburg, South Carolina. In this case, the University of South Carolina Upstate takes a big step beyond the traditional concept of community engagement toward full alliance with economic development. The Johnson

College of Business and Economics has broken ground four miles away from its main campus, in the city's Renaissance Park, a development anchored on one end by the four-star Marriott Conference Hotel and on the other by the Chapman Cultural Arts Center. The decision is explained in "The Metropolitan University as a Principal Ally and Agent of Change for Economic Development" by USCU Chancellor John C. Stockwell and the dean of the Johnson College of Business and Economics.

The exploration of an engaged metropolitan university's role as a regional "change agent" continues in "Partnering with State Government to Transform a Region" by California State University, Fresno President John D. Welty and Michael Lukens of the California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley (CPSJV). The two authors chronicle the creation of the Regional Jobs Initiative, a public-private partnership that develops short- and long-term strategies for the two-county Fresno region and its expansion into the CPSJV, a partnership that addresses economic, social, and environmental issues in an eight-county area.

A different perspective is taken in a paper on the challenges of an urban-located land grant university in articulating and implementing a strategic urban land grant vision that places urban/metropolitan engagement at the center of the institution's future. In "Advancing an Urban Agenda: Principles and Experiences of an Urban Land Grant University," three faculty members from the University of Minnesota discuss their institution's efforts to grapple with the concept that "urban universities will be the land grant universities of the twenty-first century."

Matthew Durlington and his co-authors present research on a different and persistent challenge in urban engagement – the impact of gentrification. Through their work on the Towson Metropolitan Ethnography Project, students and faculty from Towson University collaborate with new and traditional residents of Baltimore's oldest historic African American community to understand contemporary tensions. Their description of historic origins and forces for change in "Civic Engagement and Gentrification Issues in Metropolitan Baltimore" is a fascinating story that reveals how political and economic choices long ago can shape a neighborhood even today. The authors discuss how influential individuals and wide engagement of different views can help contribute to meaningful change.

At Northern Kentucky University, faculty, staff, and students are building bridges to regional stewardship through the Vision 2015 regional action plan for Northern Kentucky. One of the key components of the plan is educational excellence. Jaesook Gilbert, Kimberly Miller, and Helene Harte, all hired as Regional Steward faculty by NKU to contribute to Vision 2015, focus on the region's goal to have all children enter kindergarten with the skills needed to succeed in "Collaborating with Community Partners to Create New Directions for Young Children." Their paper discusses the first phase in the journey to develop and disseminate a kindergarten readiness definition for the region.

Responding to the needs of the competitive twenty-first century economy, two faculty members at a major research university suggest that in order to build a better talent pool for metropolitan regions, traditional teaching pedagogies need to be re-thought. College coursework that centers on one college often misses “the opportunity to prepare students for a diverse and ever-increasingly complex work environment.” In “New Models of Cross-Disciplinary Collaborative Education,” Billie Jo Zirger and Mary Beth Privitera of the University of Cincinnati present three models of education that cross disciplines and colleges to create a more creative and interdisciplinary talent pool for employers.

In summary, this issue offers a window on the far-ranging and tangible ways in which urban and metropolitan institutions of higher education, whether small or large, research intensive or regional, have connected to the needs of their regional communities. Our urban and metropolitan universities and colleges continue to ask themselves what it really means to be truly engaged regional stewards and what structures, pedagogies, and activities best support this calling.

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