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A View from the Center

The Future of Continuing Education in Metropolitan Universities

The Paradox

Academic institutions hold paradoxical places in American society, none more so than those in metropolitan communities. While free to interpret the past and anticipate the future, they must also respond to current social need and pressure. Such balancing can be difficult. How else can one explain a vibrant university, a vast storehouse of knowledge, that is surrounded by social chaos and human despair! How continuing education may help metropolitan universities to grapple with this paradox in the future is the focus of this article.

University services in metropolitan areas and the strengthening of continuing education have grown apace, especially in the past three decades. Conferences and workshops abound, as do exhibits and lectures, art and musical performances, weekend colleges and media presentations. Catalogs burst with evening courses. Distance learning and other uses of communications technology enable the tailoring of special ventures in further learning. As one outcome, continuing education in academe has won increasing legitimacy.

Despite such gains, however, rampant urbanism on a world scale has come to defy all institutions, colleges and universities among them. Cities everywhere are filled with civic puzzles; urban chaos together with skepticism of institutional efficacy have produced a genuine crisis. Public confusion fuels

This article advances knowledge utilization for greater emphasis among the functions of the university and urges that it be enhanced in the practice of civic culture. Glances at the future of continuing education are made along the dimensions of, first, education and industrial practice, and, second, the restoration of primary citizenship. The first moves easily from where continuing educators now find themselves; the second is more elusive and requires new forms of financial support and administrative organization.

voter apathy, which is then compounded even further in this country by the realignment of American federalism and a greater pressure on the resources and institutions of local communities. The challenges are as varied as they are difficult to confront. For example, attempts at mediating the risks and benefits of technical initiatives can trigger a whole range of controversies that turn into a peculiarly American epidemic of litigiousness. Moral traditions, bouncing between relativism and hedonism, find slippery footing in family, school, church, and other neighborhood institutions. All the while, the gulf between ethnic and racial groups persists or even widens, as does the distance between rich and poor.

Along the way, a growing focus on special client groups has swept across the American community life. Metropolitan communities are made up of intricate webs of private and public agencies. Each agency provides a special service, builds a client base, and defends its claims for resources and acceptance. Agency networks make the city a receiver and contributor in larger systems, but they do not create visions of the whole nor take much account of shared concerns. Indeed, narrowly focused agencies may prosper while the common enterprise weakens. Nor has the university escaped the process of being narrowly client-driven. It is also overtaken by specialized, fragmented, and entrepreneurial pursuits in the name of growth and support.

This overlap of the urban revolution with strong client orientation provokes a decisive consequence: while urban problems grow more general and interdependent, the solutions grow more specialized and disconnected. The material that follows explores how continuing education might work to correct this lack of coherence, open windows on the future, and help the university play a greater role in the development triangle of education, business, and government. The abundant and detailed panoply of programs that characterizes today's continuing education is recognized, but the commentary suggests a more general framework as the field moves toward the future.

Civic Culture and Competence

Metropolitan universities, along with their continuing education divisions, have indicated for some time a renewed concern with the meaning, direction, and method of public service. In response to these signals, the thesis of this article is this: the metropolitan university might well look at the meaning of "public" as civic culture and the meaning of "service" as helping people with the utilization of knowledge. These are orientations that will suggest a paradigmatic shift in emphasis among the functions of universities in metropolitan areas. It is one that brings continuing education, public service, and outreach into better balance with traditional teaching and research.

Tides of credentialed entrants flow from American colleges and universities into the labor market. The emphasis on career preparation is widespread and likely to increase. This development has also legitimized continuing education and will continue to do so in the future. American education is organized for creating individuals with a strong sense of self-

worth and personal skills who are determined to advance themselves in pursuit of their own ends. Such individualism would also help them serve as citizens in a free constitutional democracy, as people enabled to achieve their personal preferences and to adjudicate conflicts among competing preferences by resorting to acceptable rules of fairness.

This orientation is now being challenged. Personal preferences, and the strong individualism that underwrites them, run afoul of organized special interests. Adjudication may fail, personal preferences frustrated, with disappointment leading to retreat or even anomie. Thus human connection and interaction may weaken as well as the institutions that foster them. Lately, however, people ask if the common good cannot be better recognized and pursued. They reach out, however dimly, for a consensus on general goals that requires citizens who are able to influence the preferences of others and who are prepared to alter their own. Citizen behavior here must be receptive, flexible, imaginative, speculative, and adventuresome in solving problems. These are the skills of civic competence, broadly conceived, embodied in the acts of a primary citizenship. Both civic competence and primary citizenship have been shortchanged by American education. They need to be restored, for they affect almost every sector, including economics and the entire production system. In this manner, civic competence and knowledge utilization are concepts for thinking about the priorities of metropolitan universities. They give unity to otherwise disparate activities, serving as elements of theory and practice for continuing education toward urban reconstruction.

Two qualifications, however, are in order. Despite the danger of too narrow a response to client demands, countless services of metropolitan universities will continue to focus on specific needs, among them the whole repertory of continuing education itself. Such targeted services cannot be replaced, nor should they be, but with patience and skill, and however ambiguous the process, they should gain from examination, linkage, and a unifying vision. The second caveat is a reminder that continuing education has to reckon with the institution as a whole, understanding that teaching and research provide the substance that supports the projects of importance to the community.

Principia Media

Karl Mannheim, perceptive analyst of social change, once referred to *Principia Media* as those functions capable of special leverage in urban society. Once identified, he believed that the skillful use of these levers would yield constructive change. Using this principle seems especially fitting for metropolitan universities and continuing education. Ortega y Gasset in his *Mission of the University* said: "The university must intervene as the university in current affairs, treating the great themes of the day from its own point of view: cultural, professional, and scientific...the university must stand for serenity in the midst of frenzy, for seriousness of purpose and the grasp of the intellect in the face of frivolity and unashamed stupidity." (p. 91) In light of Mannheim's media and Gasset's themes, the commentary turns now to a pair of guidelines for the future

of continuing education in urban universities. They are *education and industrial practice* and the *restoration of primary citizenship*.

Education and Industrial Practice

The rise of continuing education is due in no small part to meeting the needs of industry. There is new recognition by the industrial sector of human resource demands in the workplace. Opportunities are abundant for partnerships of universities with industries, and many are underway. However, the academic institutions too often operate in a reactive mode that stops short of real collaboration with business and industry in defining the purposes and designing the content of training and education. A true partnership of education, business, and government is needed in order to deal with what has haunted industrial civilization from the outset: the separation of the home from the workplace. More attention is now paid to the worker as a social being, one who desires to play stronger roles in family and neighborhood. Human resource investments now gear themselves to a span from prenatal care to learning in the retirement years. New aspirations grow from old ideas: cooperation, participation, quality performance, job security, rotation, flextime, egalitarian values, joint consultation, and teamwork. Sometimes misunderstood by their business associates, continuing educators have never ceased probing the humanistic parameters of their human work. This stands them in good stead as they lead their field into stronger working relationships with business and industry.

Enriching the meaning of work leads not only to greater economic productivity but also to fuller lifestyles. The process goes beyond the human relations school that keeps workers happy but with little care for their total development, and much beyond scientific management that routinizes tasks and isolates the worker from supervision. Side by side with today's pragmatic challenges to productivity and competition is also the trend to decentralize work and reconnect it to family and community life. It finds workers exclaiming: "I want to grow, contribute, and enjoy—not one at a time, but at the same time, all the time."

The new agenda requires that business and industry, university, and government join in ways heretofore not accomplished. Continuing educators, long the facilitators between campus and corporation for upgrading the skills of workers, can now interpret and emphasize such understandings as those following.

- Learning, working, and leisure need to be interwoven throughout a lifetime;
- Leisure needs to be redesigned for creative use rather than escape from work;
- Demonstrated competence is properly overtaking paper certification;
- Flexible patterns of time spent at work, and of education, training, leave time, and pension systems are in need of more emphasis;

- More knowledge is needed of the structure of job markets and labor mobility, the relation of education to job success, and how best to merge occupational and social aspirations;
- Ways are needed to determine both the human value and the market value of continuous learning.

An extended and more carefully articulated partnership of industry, government, and the university will recognize that, for whatever the reasons, work itself seems troubled in American society. Taking up the agenda, the partnership will surely mark this uncertainty for early attention. Americans hold work as a fundamental measure of self-esteem. For those who desire work but find it withheld, and for those who are underemployed, the American dream will seem far off indeed. Over the social agenda on work hangs a special failure: the continuing plight of youth trapped in the central cities. How to help these youth get on a pathway to mature adulthood and meaningful careers is such a crisis that until it is better done the partnership of education, business, and government will remain embarrassed. Other issues also deserve more than casual notice: how to resolve the tension between being a good worker and being a good parent; enhancing the retirement years by inviting older people to the campus for further learning and then helping them enter community service. Just as the insurance agent helps people plan for death, more can be done by the educator to help people plan for life.

The Restoration of Primary Citizenship

Perhaps the 1990s will establish a new baseline for urban reconstruction. The 1960s and its war on poverty gave strong emphasis not only to a stream of urban initiatives but also to models for what metropolitan universities might do. Departments of urban affairs sprang up, and the Ford Foundation supported fruitful experiments in several institutions. While remnants of these initiatives remain, the momentum of the period was not sustained.

But now a fresh and positive urgency is sending signals to the universities and other institutions of metropolitan America. There are fresh stirrings of primary citizenship, that overlap of actions people take in their families and at their workplaces, in other local institutions and associations as distinct from civic allegiance to the state for which this citizenship is the ultimate foundation. Indeed, these stirrings indicate a desire that expert-led and specialized approaches from the top give way to citizen action from the bottom. While social fragmentation and discord may lurk in grassroots enthusiasms, they can also become the chemistry for igniting an urban renaissance and building up a genuine affection for cities, an affection which, on the whole, Americans seem not to possess.

It is important that metropolitan universities hear these stirrings and become major actors in shaping the vision and the goals of their respective areas. Continuing education and its outreach instruments should seize upon those initiatives that are peculiarly suited to the educational mission of the university. Three recommendations follow:

- to educate people about education, especially as it concerns urban schools;
- to provide training to enhance the quality of local government and volunteer leadership; and
- to take steps to heighten science literacy in general and the use of knowledge for problem solving in particular.

Metropolitan Education

Americans in every metropolitan area are asking what their schools can do for them. No reversal of the urban crisis is possible until this question is answered, consensus is built, and the solutions are worked through to completion. Little will happen until the citadels of learning, the universities, become truly serious about the process, which, on the whole, they have yet to do. Theodore Hesburgh, the former President of Notre Dame University, minced no words when he said in 1984: "The general lack of concern on the part of higher education for elementary and secondary education is at the heart of the nationwide educational crisis."

To make matters more difficult, the concern does not stop with the schools. It also includes the behaviors of families and parents, technical support services, and the many aspects of community atmosphere that influence youth. All such factors considered, American youth are failing because society is failing them. Fully a fourth of America's youth risk joining an underclass with little hope of taking up the responsibilities and privileges of an active, positive citizenship. And no group or location in metropolitan communities is exempt from such misadventures of youth as dropping out of school, teenage pregnancy, and substance abuse. Also taking their toll are oppressive poverty, racial discrimination, a work force that many youth are not prepared to enter, and conflicting interests that impede workable policies for families and youth.

Continuing education that is backed by the entire university and directed toward neighborhood and community understanding, commitment, and action, should be among the primary influences of this crusade. While each situation will require unique approaches, such actions as those following might help guide continuing educators along the way:

- Gather, update, organize, and share research *knowledge* on how youth move to self-confident adulthood; form partnerships to retrieve and share existing information; facilitate applied research; and evaluate and document youth development efforts.
- Form school and/or community partnerships that devise *strategies* for prevention programs, including placing multiple university projects in common pilot areas.
- Conduct research-based *training* for those who serve school and youth organizations, as well as systems that recruit and train volunteers.

- Devise with others and evaluate *policy* options that will improve on such complex and related domains as taxation, economic development in neighborhoods, welfare and social security, equal opportunity, and the justice systems.
- Provide leadership on behalf of the university and other institutions for research-based *advocacy* programs that place the concerns about youth so high on the metropolitan and national agendas that they become the basis of strong and lasting resolve.

Strengthening Local Leadership

Due to a rising cynicism that the public's work is being poorly done, the need to train leaders of metropolitan efforts is now greater than ever. Even more frustrating is the suspicion that yesterday was better than tomorrow will be. Meanwhile, people feel that they are stranded outside the communication networks of politicians, lobbyists, and journalists, a perception aimed mostly at distant governmental domains but now seeping into local communities as well. Ironically, such notions become apparent at a time when new burdens fall on local areas. Fortunately, however, it may be counter-balanced by the stirrings in primary citizenship.

Training issues become, therefore, as numerous as they are varied. To begin with, models that demonstrate the use of knowledge need to be developed and tested. Both elected and volunteer leaders need to meet and understand neighborhood people and their desires, feel at ease with them, and grow skilled with connecting their own efforts to them. More congruence is required among municipal, state, and federal jurisdictions now so numerous at the local level that overlap and conflict are inevitable. Such problems need to be understood, simplified, and better managed. Superior talent must be recruited into local government and other metropolitan posts, and then be kept up to date. Tactics for achieving a consensus on visions and goals must win over those used by special interests. Not to be overlooked are training ventures for the media that support journalists and others who interpret the ups and downs of metropolitan affairs.

Tangent to training are those skills of continuing educators which enable them to convene individuals and groups in or out of the universities. Getting people together can help close the gap between citizen and expert. By means of carefully designed ventures, they can be assisted in inventing and adapting service delivery models, organizing neighborhood action, bringing knowledge to bear on policy formation, and helping establish advocacy campaigns. Continuing educators in metropolitan universities may also improve upon the rather poor "memory system" of American society, which allows projects of merit in one community to remain unidentified, and fails to transfer and review them elsewhere. At a minimum, techniques for such searches can be included in the training effort. Continuing educators might better rally themselves and their universities for such sharing on a national and perhaps international basis.

Science Literacy

The thesis that primary citizenship and civic competence are determinants in the future of complex metropolitan regions requires an emphasis on science and technology. Both are ruling themes of modern society, whether they provide the artifacts of daily living, attract interest in the policies that govern their creation and distribution, or simply give people a delight in their elegance. Science has indeed become the basis of industrial civilization, but it cannot save that civilization. Human values must come into play and insist that personal and social discipline control the exploitation of nature.

Yet only about 20 percent of the American population, what some call the "attentive minority," concern themselves with matters related to science and technology. The interests of the remainder are limited by lack of understanding, the insularity of technical experts, and the confusions rendered by conflicting interpretations of the same evidence. This creates a major need for adult education as a source of social learning, a need that especially fits the metropolitan university.

A Postscript

This article advances knowledge utilization for greater emphasis among the functions of the university and urges that it be enhanced in the practice of civic competence, broadly defined. Furthermore, the article looks at the future of, first, education and industrial practice, and, second, the restoration of primary citizenship. The first moves easily from where most continuing educators find themselves; the second remains elusive and requires more as well as new forms of financial support and administrative organization.

Such directions inevitably make the continuing education division into something that resembles an educational research and development arm of the university. It identifies new learning needs, services, and related information and convenes partners in both the university and the community to address them. Learning modes are engaged and tested in urban realities. Community-wide social learning, and the knowledge it requires, is actually an intervention in community development and serves the entire university as a unifying strategy. Finally, partnerships with industry, schools, and government prompt both the university and its partners to become more accessible to widening consultation.

Continuing education, moving down this track, must keep its own house in order by remaining adaptable to community needs and university expectations. At the university's center, continuing educators will surely need a core unit, requisite budgets, a designated staff, and advisory elements capable of linking it to home base and the community at-large. Access to physical facilities will enable the representatives of campus and community to feel at home and work effectively together. Surrounding the core unit and throughout the university will be instruments to marshal, combine, and focus intellectual and other resources in a flexible manner on specific programs and tasks: contracts, commitments, joint

appointments, and special institutes. These techniques and supports back up nontraditional projects, which, when proved effective, can join the traditional system.

No one doubts that the university must be independent in its service as a benevolent critic of society. But by its own conduct, the university can serve its community as a beacon of public discourse, hope, and aspiration. Moreover, by seizing the potentials of worldwide communications that are now embodied in the connections of television, data banks, computers, and satellites, the university can enliven and promote discourse on the community's common good, ensuring that the community is informed by the full range of intellectual, artistic, and cultural experience. And given the vision, will, and self-confidence, a single university, together with the great number of other urban institutions and organizations, may lead the city itself into becoming a university in outlook and behavior.

Suggested Readings

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