

The Essential Role of Urban and Metropolitan Universities: An Introduction to this Special Issue

Rochelle Smarr¹ and Chris Nayve²

¹ Director of Experiential Learning, University of San Diego, ² Associate Vice President for Community Engagement and Anchor Initiatives, University of San Diego

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Guest Editors: Rochelle Smarr, Ed.D. and Chris Nayve, J.D. **Editor:** Valerie L. Holton, Ph.D.

Introduction

The 27th Annual CUMU Conference held in San Diego, California, in October 2022 was the first in-person conference convened by CUMU since the 2019 conference held in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. While plans for the 2020 CUMU Conference in San Diego began in 2018, it became clear by the summer of 2020 that the pandemic would not be temporary. Adapting to the rapidly evolving social context unfolding in real time requires us to pay close attention. From enduring a global pandemic to witnessing unremitting accounts of racial and systemic inequity as well as an insurrection at the United States Capitol—a place once considered an impenetrable symbol of democracy—it became abundantly clear that context *must* inform content.

The global challenges of the past several years created significant headwinds for academic institutions and their community partners. However, the gathering in San Diego for the 27th CUMU Conference reminded us that scholars, students, administrators, and community partners have been building the collective knowledge and practices that best serve society during tumultuous moments for over two decades.

The 2022 CUMU Conference focused on “*The Essential Role of Urban and Metropolitan Universities*,” emphasizing how institutions of higher education can ensure a recovery grounded in community, equity, and innovation. Not only did the broader conversation of this conference inspire a robust exchange of ideas and visions, it all took place within the geographical boundaries of the San Diego/Mexico border region situated on the traditional and unceded territories of the Kumeyaay, Luiseno, Cahuilla, Cupeno, and Northern Diegueño. The CUMU planning team, along with the conference co-hosts and co-editors, were delighted with the enthusiastic response and willingness of colleagues yearning to gather, learn, and nurture important relationships after years of being unable to gather in person.

The work featured in this issue is thought-provoking and timely - starting with how the global pandemic demonstrated the interconnected nature of health and economic ecosystems. Unprecedented quarantine orders forced local businesses to shutter, with many never to re-open. The pandemic brought the world to the brink of an economic catastrophe. In *Collective Vision: Promoting Leadership, Partnership, and Opportunities to Improve Health in Greater Hazelwood*, take the economic lessons from a region in the northeast of the United States and detail the role of a faith-based university as an anchor institution. The authors provide a blueprint for leveraging the power of collective action through the efforts of residents, philanthropy, health centers, schools, universities, and community-based organizations committed to accessible and comprehensive quality healthcare. Launched just before the pandemic, Their collective and community-driven health model is vital in addressing community-identified health priorities, neighborhood health outcomes, and health equity issues.

Promise Parent Leadership Academy and Clemente Veterans' Initiative Newark: Two Hyperlocal, Anchor Institution Initiatives to Engage the Urban Community illustrates how large public universities with an anchor mission can intentionally work in a collaborative ecosystem with civic associations and community leaders. Through co-creation, intentional design, evaluation, and assessment, the authors illuminate the multiplier effect that anchor institutions and civic associations can have to improve lives and communities. It is important to note that the co-creative framework presented in the article is collective and not hierarchical and that “walking the anchor mission walk sets an example for other universities to be ‘of’ and not merely ‘in’ their cities.” (Anderson 2023-Page 24 or submission) (not proper citation format but wanted you to know where to draw from)

The CUMU conference is well known for featuring scholars, administrators, and practitioners at the center of praxis in community engagement, anchor institutions, place-based community engagement, and social innovation. Ofem’s article, *Leveraging University Networks in University Powered Accelerators: Best Practices and Lessons Learned* offers insights into the praxis of community engagement that CUMU is known for featuring at our conferences. By integrating the notion of “collision density” and creative class theory to understand the effectiveness of urban economic development tools, such as accelerators and incubators, to facilitate entrepreneurship, Ofem shares the lessons learned of a distinctive university-led incubator as a tool for innovation and equity.

The authors of *Reimagining Business Education Through University-Community Microenterprise Collaborations* illuminate how the transformation of a graduate business program can catalyze the evolution of business education. The authors review a partnership between an MBA program and a community-based organization that resulted in co-creating a conceptual model that includes overlapping areas: critical reflection, relational paradigms, intersectionality, multilingual communication, and intercultural praxis. Analyzing this conceptual model, the authors provide critical insights into how business schools can “reaffirm their commitment to their public purposes and the common good and to leverage their economic resources as anchor institutions.”

The field of community engagement has robust scholarship on student learning outcomes measuring the impact of community based-learning on students' academic success, sense of

belonging, and professional development. However, the assessment and evaluation of university-community partnerships is an emerging area of research by practitioners and scholars seeking to embed inclusive and equitable practices into their reciprocal relationships. The authors of *Toward a Research and Practice Agenda for Evaluation in Community-Campus Partnerships* offer a culminating piece centered on the ongoing conversation among CUMU's Community Engagement Evaluation Huddle. Participants collectively identified six directions to approach campus-community partnership evaluation practices. The six frameworks are introduced through key questions and examples yet leave room for continued research on how best to invite community partners into the evaluation process and create a mutually beneficial assessment.

From assessment to research, and program development, covering all of the bases in this work is, at times, a heavy task. Many of us in the field of community engagement are multi-hyphenated leaders: scholars-practitioners-administrators-faculty-mentors-trailblazers. Given the multiple formal and informal roles each of us can embody on any given day, one of the most influential roles is that of the scholar-administrator. Often a faculty member is a contributing author in addition to managing the day-to-day management of community-engagement centers or departments. In addition to those roles, faculty members can also serve externally to secure donor funding and build meaningful local and international partnerships. The role of scholar-administrator is essential to anchor institutions maintaining their commitment to social responsibility, developing change leaders, and reciprocity in campus-community partnerships. To truly understand the layered essence of a scholar-administrator is to know one; Dr. Patrick Green (Loyola University - Chicago) embodies this role as indicated by being the 2022 Barbara A. Holland Scholar-Administrator Award recipient.

Through a critical reflection on his experience as a practicing scholar-administrator in community engagement, Green's narrative provides an overview of where the field has been and where we must grow to meet the needs of all constituents: students, community, and university. In doing so, his acceptance speech turned essay provides a call to action for CUMU members and community engagement practitioners to build on the momentum of lessons learned and shared at the conference and return to our institutions and neighborhoods with renewed vigor and commitment.

Over the course of 27 years, the CUMU conference has been at the forefront of gathering the most forward-thinking scholars and practitioners representing every type of academic institution and community-based organization. As co-editors, we are grateful to the authors who have contributed their community-engaged knowledge and practices to this conference journal. A common thread in all the frameworks and models this journal shares is community-engaged work's collective and collaborative nature. Each author demonstrated the importance of universities not simply being *in* the community but *of* the community.

Lastly, the co-editors would like to share our appreciation for everyone who attended, presented, and/or planned the 27th Annual Conference in San Diego. It was powerful to be together in person again and experience the genuine emotions and energy that often does not translate in the virtual world. Being together allowed participants to deeply experience the distinct gifts, expertise, and wisdom of our colleagues in the field. Colleagues who role model how

collaborative and community-engaged scholarship and practice ensure that anchor institutions remain steadfast in their commitment to the public purposes of higher education.