

## Overview

The expansion of comprehensive metropolitan universities during the post–World War II period has played a significant role in the educational, social, economic, and political development of every major city in the nation. The first issue of *Metropolitan Universities* provided an overview of several ways in which these institutions can respond to the needs of their regions. Paramount among them, of course, is the extent to which metropolitan universities provide access to higher education for a highly heterogeneous constituent population and their success in dealing with the challenge posed by this diversity. That is the theme of this second issue of *Metropolitan Universities*.

Students at metropolitan universities span a wide range of ages and socioeconomic, as well as racial and ethnic, backgrounds. Many enter higher education after working for a number of years; they tend to interrupt their studies one or more times, transfer from one institution to another, and attend on a part-time basis, all of which leads to an average of seven to ten years for students to earn a baccalaureate degree. Metropolitan university students differ in their educational preparation, and most have significant family and employment obligations outside the university. Furthermore, most metropolitan universities have a predominantly commuting student body.

The diversity of the students at metropolitan universities creates a set of institutional obligations that need to be addressed. A common motif runs through most articles in this issue: the institution must adapt programs, services, and activities from the traditional model just as much as their students differ from the traditional norm. The institutional response must be pervasive and not consist of a set of distinct programs, one for each group, placed alongside traditional student affairs activities. What needs to be done and how it can be accomplished is discussed further in the articles that follow.

A complex theme like the “Challenges of Diversity” can be discussed from many perspectives and by means of several different combinations of topics. We chose to begin with a series of discussions of issues that affect all the various groups and categories represented among the students at metropolitan universities: access, remediation, and retention. Articles on each of these subjects are supplemented by subsequent discussions of three specific, but overlapping student groups: racial and ethnic minorities, older adults, and commuters.

In the lead article, Rhatigan and Kelley provide a historical framework for access and diversity. They describe a growing national commitment to broad access during the past 125 years and raise the disturbing question of whether in recent years that commitment has begun to falter. Wagner supplements the discussion of access by pointing out that a commitment to access must, of necessity, include a willingness to deal with deficiencies in

the preparation of incoming students. He offers suggestions for ensuring success.

Levitz and Noel draw our attention to the important finding that the first three to six weeks of enrollment are instrumental in determining whether a student will want to remain in college or withdraw. The writers describe ways in which metropolitan universities can use this narrow "window of opportunity" to enhance retention.

The subsequent articles by Clay, Murrell and Davis, Jacoby, Coles, and Rhodes and Lamar focus on the adaptations that should take place in metropolitan universities in order to provide a hospitable and supportive setting for the education of racial minorities, older adults, and commuters. Clay describes the difficulties faced by students of color on predominantly white campuses and suggests institutional strategies to create a more affirmative climate. Murrell and Davis discuss learning styles of adults. They stress the need for faculty and staff to become more knowledgeable about and sensitive to the different methods by which individuals learn.

Jacoby and Coles both deal with the implications of the fact that most and, in many cases, even all students at metropolitan universities commute. Jacoby suggests ways by which institutions can assess themselves with regard to their responsiveness to the student-as-commuter and provides recommendations for the enhancement of environments, programs, and services. Coles reports the result of a study indicating substantial underutilization of student services by commuting students and recommends a number of organizational and methodological adaptations of campus-based functions as well as better use of the resources of the community.

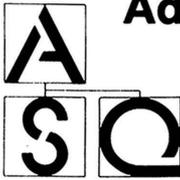
Rhodes and Lamar describe ways in which cocurricular activities can better serve the needs of a diverse and largely commuting student body. Like Coles, Rhodes and Lamar stress the importance of reaching out beyond the confines of the campus in order to enrich the life of metropolitan students. Rhodes and Lamar also point out the need to adapt preparation and continuing education of student life professionals to enable them to deal with the challenges of diversity.

The final piece contains Knable's *Forum* essay regarding the important question of verbal harassment. The author points out that free speech considerations must be balanced by an understanding of the degree of real suffering created by discriminatory remarks. She supports workshops and other ways of helping both minority and majority individuals come to grips with diversity but warns that there is no painless way of accomplishing this.

We consider the articles in this issue not as the last word but rather as the first step in an ongoing exploration of the complex and multifaceted challenge of diversity. Some dimensions, such as the importance of diversity among faculty and staff and the presence of many international students in most metropolitan universities have not been covered at all.

Others can profit from further elaboration and discussion. Descriptions of successful institutional adaptations that can be replicated elsewhere—as well as analyses of well-intended failures that may avoid similar missteps in other institutions—would be most useful. The editors invite articles, opinion pieces, items for “Interactive Strategies,” and letters for publication in future issues of *Metropolitan Universities*. Developing the theme for “Challenges of Diversity: Students in Metropolitan Universities” and working with the contributors have been most enjoyable experiences. Its real rewards will come through the impact in individual institutions and follow-up in these pages.

*John D. Jones*  
*Guest Editor*



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