

From the Editor

Barbara Holland

The 2003 conference of the Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities was organized around the theme “Metropolitan Universities: Partners in the Urban Agenda.” Conference hosts at Eastern Michigan University did an excellent job of building a series of strong plenary sessions that developed the theme with input from several national experts on the conditions and challenges of improving the quality of life in America’s most urbanized areas. Concurrent sessions gave the nearly 200 conference participants the opportunity to share and exchange examples of effective strategies for linking higher education to urban economic development.

This issue of *Metropolitan Universities* provides a sampling of conference sessions that illustrate the diversity of approaches institutions and experts are taking regarding the role of universities in cities. America is a highly urbanized nation with more than 75% of the population living in incorporated communities of 2500 or more. Even the smallest metropolitan areas face challenging issues typical of urban contexts: economic stability, sufficient employment opportunities, and quality systems and services related to health, education, public safety, and culture. Not surprisingly, CUMU institutions are advanced examples of campus-community partnerships focused on these public concerns. At the same time, most institutional leaders would also acknowledge that we have much to learn about effective collaboration, so the conference was an excellent opportunity to learn about the latest information on urban conditions and strategies.

The meeting theme was framed well by the first plenary session with Bruce Katz, Director of the Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy at The Brookings Institution in Washington, DC. He shared recent analyses of the demographic trends affecting cities and suburbs across the nation, and made some observations about what these trends mean for public policy and for urban/metropolitan universities. In particular, he shared statistics on the majority-as-minority shift in urban regions, the continued growth and diversification of suburbs, and the consequential impacts on economic mix and job location. The New Competitive Cities agenda, as he described it, begins with a focus on fixing the basics: schools, safe streets, competitive taxes and services, modern infrastructure and a functioning real estate market. He concluded by illustrating some ways that universities contribute to the development of those types of assets in cities.

Anne Habiby was the second plenary presenter and described the model for inner city development used by the Initiative for a Competitive Inner City. Like Katz, she argued that universities are engines for city economies and reminded the audience that 50% of all universities are located in the urban core. In fact, she indicated that urban core universities spend nine times more on salaries, goods, and services than the federal government spends on urban job and business development! Therefore, she urged the

Coalition to use its influence and untapped economic potential to enhance life in urban America. You will find an article based on her presentation in this collection.

Recognizing that educational institutions make a significant difference to the cities/regions they serve, the final plenary featured three different perspectives on the role and future of the metropolitan university. James Votruba, President of Northern Kentucky University, articulated the case for why metropolitan universities must be committed to community and civic engagement. He illustrated how a focus on building strong cities also builds academic quality and benefits students as well as the public. Doug Henton of Collaborative Economics noted that our institutions will only be as strong as the communities and regions they serve; therefore, we must be active “stewards of place” and work to strengthen every aspect of life in the area in which we are located. He focused in particular on four key themes that require a collaborative regional conversation: innovative economies that ensure opportunity for everyone; livable communities where people want to reside; community-based regionalism that promotes inclusive and equitable communities; and governance reform to make the public sector more responsive. Government involvement was the core theme of Dennis Jones of the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) who made the case that metropolitan university leaders must work actively with state and local government officials to develop policies that both promote and fund the urban agenda.

Additionally, during the conference, 20 different panels, involving 82 panelists, were offered in four tracks: vision and resources, metropolitan issues, organizing for action, and teaching and learning. From these, several papers are included in this issue. The focus of all the discussions, as represented by these papers, was on “best practices” and lessons learned about universities and economic/community development that are relevant to the work of other metropolitan universities.

For those of you who “crave” statistics, here are some interesting details about the 2003 Coalition Conference:

- 16 presidents/chancellors attended
- 20 vice presidents were present
- 49 different institutions were represented
- 10 associations/organizations were registered
 - American Humanics, Incorporated
 - The Brookings Institution
 - Collaborative Economics, Inc.
 - Initiative for a Competitive Inner City
 - Michigan Campus Compact
 - National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges
 - National Center for Higher Education Management Systems
 - National Science Foundation
 - Nonprofit Enterprise at Work
 - United States Department of Housing and Urban Development

In addition, kudos go to the conference team at Eastern Michigan University who, for the first time in Coalition history, garnered substantial external support from nine corporate sponsors that provided funding to help the Coalition celebrate the importance of urban higher education to our society. The corporate sponsors of the 2003 conference were:

- Burt Hill Kosar Rittelmann Associates
- Cannon Design
- Dell, Inc.
- Ford Motor Company
- Hewlett Packard
- Oak Hall
- TIAA-CREF
- Turner
- WebCT

The 2003 conference was a great success on every level, and I want to add my personal thanks and congratulations to EMU President Sam Kirkpatrick, his Executive Advisor Martha Tack and all the staff, faculty and students who contributed to meeting planning and implementation. The bar has been set high for future conferences! I also want to acknowledge Martha's assistance in preparing this review of the conference program.

To participate in these informative and innovative meetings, be sure to reserve the dates and plan to attend the 2004 CUMU Conference on October 2-5, 2004, hosted by Pace University in New York City! In addition to having access to "the city that never sleeps," participants will enjoy a program featuring the theme "Urban and Metropolitan America: The New Realities." These are very different times for all cities and metropolitan areas; and there is no better way to learn about them than by being in the city that often leads the nation in articulating solutions to many challenges of urban life. See you in New York City!