

All In: The Urban Mission: The 2019 Annual CUMU Conference

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Cite as: Watson, N.C., & Kebea, J.J. (2020) All In: The Urban Mission: The 2019 Annual CUMU Conference. *Metropolitan Universities*, 31(2), 3-6. DOI: 10.18060/24223

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The Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities (CUMU) celebrated its 25th Annual Conference in October 2019. Convening in Philadelphia PA, this conference was the largest for CUMU to date, selling out weeks in advance and drawing representatives from across the United States, Canada, and South Africa. With the theme of All In: The Urban Mission, attendees gathered purposefully to examine how universities are striving to intentionally align their goals with the priorities of their host cities to affect desired change, drive economic development and inclusion, and address issues of shared importance.

Philadelphia provided an apropos backdrop for the conference. As the birthplace of American democracy, 18th century Philadelphia was the site where our nation’s founding fathers went “All In” on a bold vision for a new and radical form of government. Today, in the 21st century, institutions of higher education continue to be bold as they aim to leverage their full power and influence to achieve more robust positive impacts as anchors within their communities.

To see the “All In” strategy in action within the Philadelphia region, the conference featured four local community experiences hosted by Drexel University, Rutgers University-Camden, Temple University, and the University of Pennsylvania. These experiences highlighted how all four of these anchor institutions are deeply embedded within their cities, engaging in a variety of community partnerships that focus on addressing community-driven needs. During these experiences, institutions showcased how they address essential topics including economic and workforce development, K-12 education and college pipeline efforts, health and wellness, hunger and homelessness relief, and affordable housing. Each institution demonstrated how they engage faculty, staff, and students in these efforts through academic courses, community-based research, and volunteerism. From each experience, it was clear the depth and breadth of institutional commitment to both addressing community needs and enhancing the teaching and research

missions of the university, and gave conference attendees a sense of what an “All In” strategy entails.

Connecting to the Current Context

The articles featured in this issue take deep dive into many of the themes highlighted during the conference, sharing novel approaches and best practices. Each article provides greater context and detail on how universities are deepening their collaborations with community partners to address community needs and implementing strong assessment and research practices to gauge the impact of these partnerships and programs.

However, the world in which higher education and community engagement exist is rapidly changing and we must be adept at quickly pivoting to address new needs and challenges as they arise. During the time lapse between the conference to the publication of this journal issue, the United States has found itself in the midst of what is being referred to by many as a triple-pandemic. In mid-March 2020 the United States was first rocked with the COVID-19 pandemic, which has resulted in more than 120,000 deaths nationally to date. Soon thereafter, communities across the country began to feel the tremendous financial fallout from widespread state and economic closures implemented to stop the spread of the virus. The third wave of the pandemic, which has existed since before this nation’s founding, arrived in the form of racial uprisings in the wake of the killings of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd and the continued racial disparities and mistreatment faced by millions of Black people in America on a daily basis.

The intertwined and critical nature of this triple-pandemic will undoubtedly change both higher education and the communities it exists within for years and, likely, decades to come. As the guest editors of this journal, we encourage you to read each piece included in this issue, recognize the timeframe and context it was written during, and then consider the current context and reality. What burgeoning issues need to be addressed moving forward as they relate to community engagement in the midst of this triple-pandemic? How do we position higher education to be responsive to complex, interconnected, and evolving realities experienced by the individuals on our campuses and the broader communities we exist within? What role does higher education hold as it pertains to addressing ongoing and systemic inequality in this country and across the globe? These are essential questions that we must grapple with ourselves, at our institutions, and within our communities in order to advance the field and the relevance of our work.

In This Issue

The first piece featured in this issue is authored by Euan Hague, a professor of geography and director in the School of Public Service at DePaul University in Chicago, Illinois. Hague is the recipient of the 2019 Barbara A. Holland Scholar-Administrator Award, an award presented annually by CUMU that recognizes individuals with a strong record of both administrative leadership and impactful scholarship. In his essay, Hague reflects on his 20-year academic journey as a geographer with a deep-rooted orientation towards community engagement and social justice that undergirds and guides his work.

The next pair of articles included in this issue focus on efforts locally and globally that aim to support underrepresented, first generation students in making a successful transition to higher education. While there has been a significant increase in the numbers of African American and Latinx youth who attend college, they still lag considerably behind their white and Asian counterparts. This is due in large part to access to a high quality K-12 education, appropriate preparation as to what to expect when they enter college, and the high cost of college overall. While the desire is there on the part of these young people to go to college, these barriers oftentimes prove insurmountable. However, Isabelle Cherney, dean of the School of Education and Social Policy at Merrimack College, Laura Douglas, president of Bristol Community College, Ellen Fischer, principal of the Early College Alliance at Eastern Michigan University, and Russell Olwell, associate dean of the School of Education and Social Policy at Merrimack address these issues by looking at equity focused, student centered dual enrollment programs from the perspective of both two and four year institutions and high schools. Using a case study approach the authors show how a well-developed program that focuses on student success from the beginning can provide opportunities not only to prepare these students for the academic rigor of college while in high school, but also allow them to achieve college credits for courses taken during this time that will also reduce time to degree completion and overall college costs.

In South Africa, the University of Pretoria's Mamelodi Campus adopted an anchor institution model to address the lingering issues of apartheid by developing community engagement programs focused on increasing access to higher education as a way of ensuring that campus diversity mirrored the diversity in the community. In this article, the authors Nthabiseng A. Ogude, Kgadi C. Mathabathe, Nosipho Mthethwa and Regina White from the University of Pretoria show how the campus moved from a community engagement model that focused on a collection of community-focused initiatives to an anchor institution model that focused on how the entirety of the university could be used to address the social, educational, and systemic economic challenges of the community of Mamelodi. One of the core approaches of this anchor work is how the campus was transformed through the creation of various STEM after-school and pipeline efforts as a way of connecting young people to academically rigorous activities that will assist them in having the appropriate academic, social and emotional skills to be successful at the university and a pathway there upon completion of their studies.

Continuing with a global focus, Donna Nickitas and Nancy Pontes from Rutgers University-Camden, present a research study that utilized engaged civic learning and social justice frameworks to prepare undergraduate nursing students for work in an increasing global context. The analysis of their study demonstrated that students enrolled in a Spanish for Health Professions course not only increased their Spanish language fluency in the medical setting, but also demonstrated marked gains in global perspectives.

Exploring entrepreneurship in urban environments, Silvia Garcia and Nina Ustymchuck from IUPUI present a research study that examines the interconnectedness of urban entrepreneurship in relation to the community resources available to support the local business community. The research shared in this article utilized a mixed-methods approach to collect data and feedback directly from community residents and business owners, illuminating the significant social capital assets necessary to build a strong culture of entrepreneurship.

Reflecting on their roles as anchor institutions, Jennifer Britton, Don Liberati, and Anna D'Isidoro from Drexel University and Jami Leveen from Aramark, a food, facilities, and uniform service corporation, discuss how they moved from a typical contract-based food supplier relationship to a community-focused, mission-driven partnership that centers on strengthening the economic development of West Philadelphia. The article shares the successes and challenges of conceptualizing, developing, and executing a complex university-corporation effort to increase local hiring, supplier diversity initiatives, and local procurement; the policies that need to be put in place to make this relationship work; and a frank conversation about some of the limitations.

In the final article of this issue, Keristiena Dodge and Sachin Pawaskar, at the University of Nebraska Omaha (UNO), underscore the importance of demonstrating impact through community engagement for higher education institutions. Dodge and Pawaskar describe UNO's multi-step process to address this critical issue from forming an institutional committee to guide the work, to creating a framework to systematically track, visualize, and share community engagement work and outcomes across the institution and beyond. The article includes a critical reflection and discussion about their process, key learnings, and recommendations for institutions that seek to follow a similar path.