1 | Civic Renewal of Higher Education through Renewed Commitment to the Public Good

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WHAT WOULD A RESEARCH UNIVERSITY BE LIKE if we were to take seriously the admonition of the Kellogg Commission to reinvent ourselves for "the times that are emerging instead of the times that have passed"?[1]

Any answer to this question must be framed in the context of today's heightened scrutiny of higher education's value proposition. We operate, after all, in an era in which the returns on investment, the *private gains* of postsecondary education, are skyrocketing and yet the promise of the American dream—that education is a rightful pathway to social mobility—has hit a wall. There are shattered dreams and dim prospects for wide swaths of our population—indeed, especially for the fastest-growing, first-generation, minority (soon to be majority), and poor, which are frequently clustered in underresourced, underachieving urban and rural schools. The promise and the reality of higher education are two very different things for far too many students with potential in this country today, and we cannot afford to turn our backs on this talent pool of the future. Questions of access, diversity, and full participation must frame our civic renewal of higher education.

To address these urgent questions adequately, we must put our best efforts outside the academy first, starting with the schools and communities that are failing so many of our best and brightest from an early age. We can't sit back and wait for the exceptional few somehow to break through the barriers—economic, social, environmental, and cultural—that derail not only their individual educational progress, but also the progress of their communities writ large. We can't take a detached attitude toward the divisive and divided social and civic landscape of our times, where groups are pitted against each other and argue over individual rights rather than work to increase the seats at the table of educational opportunity for more of our talented students. We need to concentrate on the *public good,* knowing that any progress we can make in revitalizing our communities will down the line redound to the *private benefit* of more children, ensuring that we can educate the next diverse generation of civic leaders, professionals, and citizens, and reconnect more people to the American dream. In this sense, then, our efforts at a civic renewal of higher education—moving beyond our boundaries to engage in educational and scholarly partnerships in and with

our communities—will drive the solutions needed to reinstate healthy pathways of access and opportunity.

CHANGING OUR WAYS

Any reinvention, therefore, must start from the premise that what we are doing now isn't sufficient to reignite the promise of the American dream of educational opportunity and its correlate of social mobility, at least not in a time of changing demographics, metropolitan challenges, and increasing disparities. Therefore, if we are to reinvent, we need to consider how higher education can become more publicly valuable—not just in technology transfer or in global reach, but in the places and with the people sharing those challenges of our times. Higher education needs to value its public mission—and acknowledge its social responsibility—before it can be truly valuable going forward.

Keeping in mind the failure of the American educational dream to be fully materialized in our time, we recommend four broad conceptual changes to guide the reinvention of the research university for the times that are to come.

1. From ivory towers to engaged institutions. The penchant to retreat from the world, even if in the service of constructing neutral communities characterized by unfettered debate and protected by academic freedom, is outdated. The conception of a "peaceful and thoughtful academy"—one standing apart from the fractured, hyper-partisan, and frequently brutal world in which we all live—not only isn't a true picture of many academicians' experiences, but also is at best a luxury and at worst somewhat irresponsible. It is true, physically and historically, that our campuses—many of which are located on hills over-looking our communities, as Syracuse University is—have for centuries been a place apart. Some of our buildings do resemble ivory towers, and we do have some gates and guards.[2] Down the hill are all the challenges of our rapidly urbanizing world—a degraded landscape, failing schools, pervasive poverty. All around us, we feel the tremors of the seemingly endless culture wars. As some contestants strive for a path to opportunity, others assume they can keep long-held privileges, and still others struggle for dear life to hold on to recently won gains.

But it is not true that the university is, can, or should be neutral territory, standing apart from the world. It is, in fact, an extremely contested piece of ground every single day. Certainly, members of marginalized groups and those identified as members of minority groups are keenly aware of this. It is hard to feel as if you fully belong when the threat of stereotyping follows you from the world outside the academy to interactions within it. The university is just as fraught with challenges—and ripe with possibilities—as is the world in which it is inextricably embedded. Instead of a zone of neutrality, which one might imagine as homogeneous and placid with "balanced," polite debates, the university more often resembles a battle zone where interest groups and disciplines and fervent disciples clash in fits and spurts, trying to gain ground or even survive to see another battle. By contrast, the university could instead be, or at least could aspire to be, a zone of diversity—inclusive not exclusive, engaging and energized by diverse perspectives and positions without needing a winning view, and engaged in dialogue across difference that recognizes our shared fates

and responsibilities, both within the academy and in the wider world. We can get out of the ivory tower and fulfill our role as members of anchor institutions in our own communities, drawing connections to national and global contexts, but we need to relinquish some control and to operate in a much messier world than we are accustomed to in the academy.

That is precisely what we had in mind at Syracuse University when we began collaborating with a wide range of partners—public, private, nonprofit, academic—to develop the Connective Corridor, an urban pathway that traverses the city from the eponymous hill on which the university sits, across downtown, terminating in one of the region's oldest neighborhoods. This pedestrian- and bike-friendly route unites cultural venues, parks, public memory projects, and technology hot spots. A two-way "street" that is both physical and metaphorical, the Connective Corridor spurs conversations that flow both ways between the university and its many collaborators and generates one-of-a-kind engagement opportunities, including one of the largest urban video projects in the nation and an "Iconic Syracuse" billboard project developed by students in collaboration with the local historical association. That give and take is not only method-ologically optimal for our scholarship because it brings more perspectives to defining, analyzing, and solving problems, but it also immerses our students in the broader world where they can see how knowing and doing intertwine.

2. From meritocracies to cultivators of talent. Higher education effectively has ceded responsibility to define academic quality and college readiness to the popular press, whose measures tend to focus on inputs—such as the test scores of students before they enroll in college and on how many applicants colleges reject—and whose motives are primarily to sell more magazines or generate more click-throughs. Bill Gates captured the nonsensical—indeed, perverse—nature of such measures:

> If you try and compare two universities, you'll find out a lot more about the inputs—this university has high SAT scores compared to this one. And it's sort of the opposite of what you'd think. You'd think people would say, "We take people with low SATs and make them really good lawyers." Instead they say, "We take people with very high SATs and we don't really know what we create, but at least they're smart when they show up here so maybe they still are when we're done with them."[3]

What if, instead, we measured students' potential for success based on a wider portfolio, tapping entrepreneurial and leadership attitudes, taking into account where they have been and assessing where they might go—as, for example, the Posse Foundation does in its recruitment process?[4] In this context, we might credit universities as much for whom they reach as for whom they reject, and as often for how far their students go as for where they began. There are plenty of reasons to do just this.

Demographic shifts well underway are widening the already existing gaps in access to college. Fewer than 30 percent of students in the bottom quartile of family incomes manage to enroll in a four-year school. Of these, fewer than half graduate.[5] Even after accounting for financial aid, costs have gone up nearly 37 percent in the last twenty years at private institutions and 59 percent

at publics (from a much lower base, of course),[6] while many students whose families need them to help out financially at home can't face years of lost wages and huge debts.[7] The already bad prognosis for income inequality and social mobility is worsened by the fact that often high-achieving, low-income students do not even apply to selective colleges, choosing instead to attend colleges that tend to have fewer resources and lower graduation rates.[8] We need to target our efforts at building the student bodies of our institutions in ways that will reverse these trends.

We can start in the communities of which we are a part. For example, at Syracuse University we partnered with the Say Yes to Education Foundation and the Syracuse City School District (SCSD), as well as the Syracuse Teachers Association, the county and city, and numerous other educational and community-based organizations in 2008 to work on closing the opportunity gap for an entire city's public schools by providing crucial, comprehensive socio-emotional, academic, health, financial, and legal supports for all twenty-one thousand city public schoolchildren and their families.[9] Through the Say Yes Higher Education Compact, SCSD students receive tuition support at fifty-four private institutions and New York State's public campuses. As of fall 2012, the compact had already supported more than 2,100 students in making the transition to college, including 174 to Syracuse University.

This approach to cultivating talent within communities also engages four-year institutions with community colleges in order to build hybrid models of educational opportunity such as are recommended in the Century Foundation's recent report *Bridging the Higher Education Divide.*[10] Moreover, by taking seriously our responsibility to cultivate talent broadly, we all become more attuned to the robust pool of talent in what we call "geographies of opportunity" in metropolitan regions around our nation—a talent pool we cannot afford to leave behind.

3. *From disciplinary silos to collaborative public scholarship.* Disciplines naturally branched out as the modern research university developed from the late nineteenth century; disciplinary norms and rewards developed and concretized right along with them, building a landscape of academic silos that persists today. Checklists for tenure and promotion decisions tend to reflect the same narrow forms of scholarship and restricted sets of publishing venues that they have for decades. Ironically, practically everyone in higher education today recognizes that these structures are ill suited to grappling with the messy, integrated, and critical problems we face on a global scale. Major funding organizations across the sciences, humanities, and arts have developed programs aimed specifically at breaking down these silos.[11] We within the academy must change our cultural norms to accelerate inter-, multi-, and trans-disciplinary collaboration.

Still, our traditions of defining what "counts" as scholarship can militate against embracing scholarly activities that look different from the prevailing disciplinary norms. We struggle to develop metrics attuned to the modes and methods of collaborative research and scholarship that cross sectors, involve funding that does not exclusively or even primarily accrue to the bottom line of the institution, and produce "products" that are difficult to count or attribute

individually and whose impact may take considerable time to be realized.[12] Indeed, such publicly engaged scholarship can be a nightmare when viewed from the perspective of traditional counts—research dollars flowing through the university's budget, scholarly citations, short-term impact—yet it contributes powerfully to fulfilling higher education's role as a public good and, therefore, should count.[13] In fact, as we consider the diverse faculty of the future—many of whom are likely to have deep ties to communities and commitments to community partnerships, including working with students on publicly engaged scholarship and teaching—we will increasingly find not only that this scholarship *should* count, but also that it *must* count. This realization will require deep reflection on how to reward excellence in public scholarship, teaching, and engagement.

Making this happen is hard work. At Syracuse, it took us several years of sometimes heated debate, both about how to build into our institutional values and reward structures an explicit recognition of interdisciplinary, collaborative, and publicly engaged scholarship and about how to describe such scholarship in our faculty manual. But the benefits of this hard work are exquisite, generating scholarship that really makes a difference and creating the most engaging learning environments imaginable for our students. Working in tandem with the Tenure Team Initiative of Imagining America (an initiative led by Tim Eatman and Julie Ellison), our faculty senate revised the rules on promotion and tenure to acknowledge public scholarship, which may be published or presented in nontraditional ways. In addition, the Imagining America Publicly Active Graduate Education collaborative seeks to inspire and orient the next generation of graduate students differently, with all that portends, and they're getting the message.[14] As one participant, graduate student Janeane Anderson, blogged resolutely, "Far too often, academicians engage community organizations with preconceived knowledge hierarchies that privilege scholarship borne within the university over that which springs from the community. Mindsets that consider community-based knowledge as an addendum to scholarly work rather than something that stands alone must be changed in order to effectively integrate community-based expertise within the academy. New generations of academicians must fully embrace their dual citizenship within the academy and the community that surrounds the institution."[15]

4. From the "cult of the expert" to "communities of experts." Among the most persistent norms crystalized by the research university's development is the prevailing attitude of academics toward the role of nonacademics in the innovation process. This is seen nowhere more clearly than in the way universities tend to engage with research problems in their local communities, an approach evidencing what Harry Boyte has written eloquently about as a "cult of the expert."[16] Way too often, our "outreach activity" consists of one-off, short-term projects that are primarily one-way in character, and when "solutions" do arise out of this work, they never seem to last. In a similar vein, we have all heard from prospective private-sector partners that our rigid formulations for ascribing intellectual property create significant disincentives to pool expertise on problems from engineering healthier buildings to assuring consumer security in cyberspace.

To break down these self-imposed barriers, we need to leverage the role of our universities as anchor institutions. We need to create a two-way street of engagement

with diverse, cross-sectoral, reciprocal partnerships—inside and outside of the academy—with "experts" with and without standard academic pedigrees. A pivotal aspect of this work will be building a more robust armature for ascribing and rewarding intellectual property rights that will catalyze cross-sector collaboration on innovation.

This is precisely the aim of our work on Syracuse's Near Westside, a "majority minority" neighborhood that includes the nation's ninth poorest census tract and faces challenges found in many urban communities nationally and globally, including high rates of crime, environmental degradation, illiteracy, poor health, and joblessness. Seven years ago, a group of residents joined with Syracuse University and with foundations, businesses, nonprofits, and officials in state and city government to create a new nonprofit organization, the Near Westside Initiative, dedicated to reasserting the strength of the community and tapping its often hidden potential. Instead of setting up a "command and control" model directed exclusively by university experts, the initiative adopted a collaborative model, asking participants to meet for consultation and discussion and to move toward a common goal. Although this process can be loud and messy, the result has been an environment that allows, inspires, creates, and sustains a host of innovative and successful collaborations of "experts" of all descriptions.[17]

Scholarship in Action

Enacting this multifaceted vision at Syracuse University has entailed recognizing that an innovative society and an inclusive society go hand in hand. We cannot solve the world's grand challenges without full participation by our entire talent pool—those with and without standard pedigrees, and those who do and do not fall squarely within our usual measures of high achievers. The way forward is to embrace an agenda that commits us to linking public problem solving with full participation, building a vibrant "architecture of inclusion," as Susan Sturm calls it,[18] on and off and between campus and community.

An innovative society and an inclusive society go hand in hand

A foundational aspect of this architecture is finding or forging the physical or metaphorical spaces where we can meet our partners from outside the academy in thought and action—"third spaces" that are not "owned" by any one partner and that constitute common ground where each participant's expertise is acknowledged and valued. The result is what the Association of American Colleges and Universities Caryn McTighe Musil sees as a new paradigm for "generative partnerships": traditional university-community boundaries are reimagined, partners employ democratic processes to achieve genuinely reciprocal engagement, institutions emphasize their citizenship, and effectiveness is measured by impact.[19]

These deep engagements intertwine education, public scholarship, and innovation even as they simultaneously open up our universities, bringing diversity, dialogue across difference, and "just academic spaces"—as Syracuse's Democratizing Knowledge faculty working group labels them[20]—back to campus. They lead us to transform how we do admissions, create inter-group dialogue curricula,[21] pursue and reward public scholarship, and view our institutional citizenship—

locally, nationally, and globally. In the process, faculty members in each discipline gain extraordinary opportunities to do work that is consequential both on the ground and in their fields, from envisioning and building urban landscapes that catalyze interaction among city residents to designing and implementing public health interventions in an innovative setting such as a community grocery store—all while exchanging and integrating ideas with professionals and with the toughest critics of all, end users in the community. At the same time, our public scholars are creating exceptional learning environments where their students can test their knowledge among this diverse and exacting "community of experts."

The Path Forward: Universities as Zones of Diversity, Dialogue with Contest, and Engagement

This kind of reinvention of the role and practices of the research university is aimed at fulfilling its public mission—its fundamentally democratic mission—by making a difference on the most pressing challenges of our day and simultaneously making progress on achieving the American dream of social mobility through education by training the next diverse generation of civically minded professionals, citizens, and leaders. Yet it is not for the faint of heart, as it involves working across traditional boundaries, enduring contested politics and heated dialogue, enacting a somewhat different version of academic freedom (a luxury perhaps more fitting when everyone is more or less alike on campus), and even bucking mainstream renditions of meritocracy (at least as enshrined in *US News & World Report* or in assessments of research powerhouses defined by institutional bottom lines). Reinventing the research university in this way is hard work, in part because it grounds noble intentions such as equity, fairness, inclusiveness, and shared responsibility that have long been embraced by higher education in the realities of specific places—our communities. It also relies on specific strategies for tapping the untapped talent within these places—suggesting, perhaps, the image of a nationwide "farm system" in which talented individuals in specific communities are cultivated, yielding a talent pool that serves the collective interests of all institutions and the public at large. (This agrarian metaphor aptly echoes the Morrill Acts in which higher education's public mission is ensconced).

As hard as this place-based work may be, the stakes are simply too high for us not to act decisively in order to shift higher education paradigms the way they need to be shifted. Not only the prosperity of individuals, but the prosperity of our democracy itself, hangs in the balance. As John Dewey once observed, "we have taken democracy for granted . . . it has to be enacted anew in every generation, in every year and day, in the living relations of person to person in all social forms and institutions."[22] In this light, it's always time for renewal in higher education, and today that means thinking and acting in ways that more clearly and demonstrably serve the public good.

Notes

1. Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities, *Renewing the Covenant: Learning, Discovery, and Engagement in a New Age and Different World*

(Washington, DC: National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, 2000), 9.

2. Since this chapter was composed, the authors both have moved to Rutgers University-Newark. Illustrations of their work here are drawn from their time at Syracuse from 2004 to 2013.

3. Quoted in Jeffrey R. Young, "A Conversation with Bill Gates about the Future of Higher Education," *Chronicle of Higher Education,* June 25, 2012, http://chronicle.com/article/A-Conversation-With-Bill-Gates/132591.

4. The Posse Foundation conducts one of the nation's most innovative college access and youth leadership development programs in the nation, built around an understanding that prevailing definitions of academic talent and ability are too narrow. For a full description of its methodology for identifying talented students who might otherwise go unnoticed and cultivating them in partnership with colleges and universities, see http://www.possefoundation.org/about-posse.

5. Jason DeParle, "For Poor, Leap to College Often Ends in a Hard Fall," *New York Times,* December 22, 2012, A30–31.

6. Sandy Baum and Jennifer Ma, *Trends in College Pricing 2012* (New York: The College Board, 2012), 19–21.

7. DeParle, "Leap," A30.

8. Caroline Hoxby and Christopher Avery, "The Missing 'One-Offs': The Hidden Supply of High-Achieving, Low-Income Students," *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity* (Spring 2013): 1–65.

9. For a complete description of Say Yes to Education Syracuse, see http://www.sayyessyracuse.org.

10. The Century Foundation Task Force on Preventing Community Colleges from Becoming Separate and Unequal, *Bridging the Higher Education Divide: Strengthening Community Colleges and Restoring the American Dream* (Washington, DC: The Century Foundation, 2013).

11. To name but a few: the National Science Foundation describes as a "high priority" the effort to foster interdisciplinary research through programs such as Science, Engineering, and Education for Sustainability; Networking and Information Technology Research and Development and the National Nanotechnology Initiative (see http://www.nsf.gov/od/oia/additional_resources/interdisciplinary_research); the Mellon Foundation has been expanding its Research Universities and Scholarship in the Humanities program specifically to foster interdisciplinary work (see http://www.mellon.org/grant_programs/programs/higher-education-and-scholarship/researchuniversities); and the National Endowment for the Arts has convened the Federal Interagency Task Force on the Arts and Human Development in order to encourage more and better research on how the arts can help people reach their full potential at all stages of life—and task force members span the federal government, including the US Department of Health and Human Services, the National Institutes of Health, the National Science Foundation, and the US Department of Education (see http://nea.gov/national/TaskForce/index.html).

12. Questions about the time scale or schedule of "counting" are also critical. The traditional media-driven rankings are geared to selling magazines, year in and year out, and so they undervalue impacts and outcomes that take a while to evolve. They also tend to include slight variations on standard metrics in order to (somewhat artificially) introduce change in the rankings without really capturing the dynamics of what an institution is "doing" over time.

13. See, for example, the first-person accounts of publicly engaged scholars in Julie Ellison and Timothy K. Eatman, *Scholarship in Public: Knowledge Creation and Tenure Policy in the Engaged University* (Syracuse, NY: Imagining America, 2008).

14. Imagining America: Artists and Scholars in Public Life is a national consortium of publicly engaged artists, designers, scholars, and other community members working with institutions of higher education to enrich civic life. Drawing upon the humanities, arts, and design, the organization seeks to catalyze change in campus practices, structures, and policies that enables publicly engaged artists and scholars to thrive and contribute to community action and revitalization. Through its tenure initiative, Imagining America strives to facilitate discussion nationally about reforming tenure and promotion policies to account for publicly engaged scholarship. Another initiative, the Publicly Active Graduate Education program, cultivates graduate students to be publicly engaged scholars. Further information about Imagining America may be found at http://www.imaginingamerica.org.

15. Janeane Anderson, "Linked Fates: Why Campus-Community Collaborations are Necessary for Community Development," *PAGE Blog Salon* (blog), September 14, 2012, http://www.imaginingamerica.org/blog/2012/09/14/linked-fates-why-campus-community-collaborations-are-necessary-for-civic-development.

16. Harry Boyte, *Civic Agency and the Cult of the Expert* (Dayton, OH: The Kettering Foundation, 2009).

17. For a more complete description of this work, see Nancy Cantor, Peter Englot, and Marilyn Higgins, "Making the Work of Anchor Institutions Stick: Building Coalitions and Collective Expertise," *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement* 17, no. 3 (June 2013): 7–16.

18. Susan P. Sturm, "The Architecture of Inclusion: Interdisciplinary Insights on Pursuing Institutional Citizenship," *Harvard Journal of Law & Gender* 29, no. 2 (2006): 248–334.

19. Caryn McTighe Musil, "Connective Corridors and Generative Partnerships: A New Paradigm," *Diversity & Democracy* 16, no. 1 (2013): 6.

20. The Democratizing Knowledge project at Syracuse University is composed of critical scholars from interdisciplinary programs and departments whose self-described focus is "confronting white privilege, hegemonic masculinity, heteronormativity, and colonial heritages." Further information about the group may be found at http://democratizingknowledge.org.

21. A multi-university project under the direction of the University of Michigan's Patricia Gurin and her colleagues has developed exemplary, rigorous curricula and research on facilitating dialogue across differences among students, especially, but also including faculty and staff in higher education institutions and in K-12 schools. See Patricia Y. Gurin, Biren A. Nagda, and Ximena Zúñiga, *Dialogue Across Difference: Practice, Theory, and Research on Intergroup Dialogue* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2013).

22. John Dewey, "Education and Social Change," *Bulletin of the American Association of University Professors* 23, no. 6, (1937): 472–3.