

Democratic Devolution: How America's Colleges and Universities Can Strengthen Their Communities

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INTRODUCTION

In the face of a deepening economic and political crisis, the U.S. political and governing system is deadlocked. We need a new way forward. The old and tired government versus markets debate is just that—old and tired. It's time for a broader mobilization of America's civic resources, including the nonprofit sector and especially our colleges and universities.

We see government as a catalyst that stimulates new forms of interaction and partnerships between all sectors of society. Based on our experience at the University of Pennsylvania, we believe government should challenge all institutions of higher education (public and private; community colleges, colleges, and universities) to contribute systematically to improving the quality of life and learning in their local communities.

When called to service (e.g., Peace Corps, AmeriCorps) young people have answered the call.

Each year, more than 75,000 citizens serve through AmeriCorps alone. But it is not enough to simply call upon college students to serve. Rather, government should challenge institutions of higher education, as well as students, to make a greater contribution to the public good.

America's colleges and universities represent immense concentrations of human and economic capital (with nearly four million employees, 20 million enrolled students, \$400 billion in endowments, and \$1 trillion in annual economic activity). As "anchor institutions," they have the potential to be sources of stability and permanence in civic partnerships with government and the private sector to revitalize local communities. For colleges and universities to fulfill their great potential and more effectively contribute to positive change in their communities, cities, and metropolitan areas, however, they will have to critically examine and change their organizational cultures and structures and embed civic engagement

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across all components of the institution. Through more effectively targeting existing resources, as well as utilizing both modest financial incentives and the bully pulpit, the federal government can stimulate colleges and universities to realize their stated—but not fully realized—mission of service to society.¹

To realize this potential, we recommend a five-part strategy:

First, Congress should create a new federal commission—comprised of local, state, and national government officials along with leaders from the private sector and higher education—to forge civic partnerships with the nation’s institutions of higher education;

Second, the commission should develop innovative strategies for integrating federal programs and funding streams, as well as aligning federal efforts with these new local civic partnerships that involve colleges and universities;

Third, the commission should promote regional consortia of higher educational institutions to significantly and effectively improve schooling and community life;

Fourth, the federal government should create prestigious Presidential Awards for outstanding Higher Education-Civic Partnerships, and;

Fifth, government should provide support to colleges and universities based on the “Noah Principle”—funding given only for building arks (producing real change), not for predicting rain (describing the problems that exist and will develop if actions are not taken).

DEMOCRATIC DEVOLUTION

John Gardner, arguably the leading spokesperson for the democratic, engaged, cosmopolitan, civic university, thought and wrote about organizational devolution and the university’s potential role for nearly a generation. He called for new forms of government interaction and integration, both vertically—that is, among federal, state, and local governments—as well as horizontally, among agencies at each level of government. Government integration

alone, however, was not enough; new forms of interaction among public, for-profit, and nonprofit sectors would also be essential. Therefore, Gardner proposed that government function as a collaborating partner, facilitating cooperation among all sectors of society, including higher educational institutions, to support and strengthen individuals, families, and communities.²

To extend Gardner’s observation, in a high-functioning democratic society, the government would not be solely responsible for the delivery

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of services; it would instead have macrofiscal responsibilities, including funding stable, ongoing, effective partnerships. This strategy also requires creatively and adapting the work and leveraging the extraordinary resources of a wide variety of local institutions (e.g., higher educational institutions, hospitals, businesses, neighborhood and faith-based organizations) to the particular needs and resources of local communities, and galvanizing the support of local government to help pave the way. The strategy assumes, however, that “higher eds,” particularly research universities, which simultaneously constitute preeminent international, national, and local institutions, potentially represent by far the most powerful and creative partners for change and improvement in America’s cities and communities.

Of course, for colleges and universities to realize their great potential and really contribute to a “democratic devolution,” they will have to do things very differently than they do now. Colleges and universities are being increasingly pressured to act, but in order for them to act effectively, they must overcome the burdens of history and tradition. In particular, they need to overcome the fragmentation of disciplines, overspecialization, and division

between and among the arts and sciences and professions that are particularly characteristic of all major research universities. These departmental and disciplinary divisions have served to increase the isolation of universities from society.

A 1982 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) report entitled “The University and the Community” noted, “Communities have problems, universities have departments.”³ Beyond being a criticism of universities, that statement neatly indicates why universities have not contributed as they should. Quite simply, their unintegrated, fragmented, internally conflictual structure and organization work against understanding and helping to solve highly complex human and societal problems. Moreover, as it currently operates, the American higher educational system does not contribute to the development of democratic communities and schools. Among other deficiencies, American universities significantly contribute to a schooling system that is elitist and hierarchical.

THE ROLE OF HIGHER EDS

In the twenty-first century, it seems to us that research universities are perhaps the most influential institution in advanced societies. They possess enormous resources (most significantly human resources), play a leading role in developing and transmitting new discoveries and educating societal leaders, and in large measure shape the schooling system. Moreover, as numerous communities have experienced capital flight, institutions of higher education have remained as critical sources of stability. Community colleges, colleges, and universities (public as well as private) all play crucial, multi-faceted roles in their communities and surrounding regions as anchor institutions— including in education, research, service, housing and real estate development, employment, job training, purchasing, hiring, business incubation, and cultural development.

But why should higher educational institutions serve as powerful collaborators in economic, educational, and civic renewal efforts? Colleges and universities are place-based institutions deeply affected by their local environment. The future of higher educational institutions and their communities and cities are intertwined. As such, they have a strong economic

stake in the health of their surrounding communities and—due to the scale and scope of their operations—the resources to make a genuine difference. Because they can make a difference in the lives of their neighbors, colleges and universities have a moral and ethical responsibility to contribute to the quality of life in their communities.

Moreover, when institutions of higher education give high priority to solving real-world problems in their communities, it’s more likely that they will

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significantly advance learning, research, teaching, and service. In this way they will overcome what Penn’s founder Benjamin Franklin stigmatized in 1789 as “ancient Customs and Habitudes” that impede the development of mutually beneficial, higher education-civic partnerships.⁴ More specifically, by focusing on solving universal problems that are manifested in their local communities (such as poverty, poor schooling, inadequate healthcare), institutions of higher education will generate knowledge that is both nationally and globally significant, and be better able to realize their primary mission of contributing to a healthy democratic society.

The history of American colleges and universities strongly supports our claim that the democratic mission is, and should be, the primary mission for U.S. higher education. The founding purpose of both colonial colleges and historically black colleges and universities was to educate young people for service to others. Fulfilling America’s democratic promise was the founding purpose of land-grant universities. And the specific urban-

serving mission for higher education dates from the late 19th century, notably the founding of the Johns Hopkins University, the first modern university, in 1876. William Rainey Harper, the first president of the University of Chicago, was the most eloquent and powerful proponent for the engagement of universities with their cities and communities. He helped the University of Chicago become perhaps the greatest university at the turn of the last century by acting on the premise that involvement with the city, particularly its schools, would powerfully advance faculty research and student learning.

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Simply put, strengthening democracy at the expense of old social hierarchies served as the central mission for the development of the American research university, including both land-grant institutions and urban universities, such as Hopkins, Chicago, Columbia and Penn. As political scientist Charles Anderson (1993) observed in *Prescribing the Life of the Mind*:

With deliberate defiance, those who created the American university (particularly the public university, though the commitment soon spread throughout the system) simply stood this [essentially aristocratic] idea of reason on its head. Now it was assumed that the widespread exercise of self-conscious, critical reason was essential to *democracy* [original emphasis]. *The truly remarkable belief arose that this system of government would flourish best if citizens would generally adopt the habits of thought hitherto supposed appropriate mainly for scholars and scientist* [emphasis added]. We vastly expanded access to higher education. We presumed it a general good, like transport, or power, part of the infrastructure of the civilization.⁵

Since the end of the Cold War, there has been a substantive and public re-emergence of engaged

scholarship. Leading academics and university presidents have made the intellectual case that higher educational institutions, particularly urban universities, would better fulfill their core academic functions, including advancing knowledge and learning, if they focused on improving conditions in their cities and local communities.

A burgeoning higher education civic engagement movement—spurred in part by national programs such as the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s Community Outreach Partnership Centers and the Corporation for National and Community Service’s Learn and Serve America—has also developed to better educate students for citizenship and to improve schooling and the quality of life across the United States, and even globally. Service-learning, volunteer projects, institutional investment and support are some of the means that have been used to create mutually beneficial, civic partnerships designed to make a profound difference in the community and on the campus.

For example, between 1994 and 2006, over 200 higher eds received Community Outreach Partnership Center (COPC) grants through HUD’s Office of University Partnerships. One thousand higher eds received grants over the life of Learn and Serve America (1993 to 2009) through the Corporation for National and Community Service, established by President Clinton. Campus Compact, a national coalition of community college, college, and university presidents dedicated to civic engagement, grew from three institutional members in 1985 to nearly 1,200 today, approximately a quarter of all higher eds in the United States. In a 2011 Campus Compact survey, responding institutions reported that 98% have at least one partnership with a community-based organization; more specifically, 95% have partnerships with K-12 schools, 82% with faith-based organizations, and 69% with government agencies. These campuses also reported that 37% of their students were engaged in service, service-learning, or civic engagement activities in 2010-2011.⁶

Throughout the past decade, organizational developments have also occurred to promote the economic and community development role of public and private higher educational institutions, including

the founding of the Coalition of Urban Serving Universities, the new Office on Urban Initiatives within the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities, and the Anchor Institutions Task Force (AITF). Since we are most involved with the latter, we provide a brief summary of AITF below to illustrate our argument of a developing higher education civic engagement movement.

In 2009, a national task force coordinated by the University of Pennsylvania advised U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) on how the agency could leverage anchor institutions, particularly higher educational and medical institutions (“eds and meds”), to improve communities and help solve urban problems. Soon after the Anchor Institutions Task Force submitted its report, “Anchor Institutions as Partners in Building Successful Communities and Local Economies,” it became a formal organization with the mission of forging democratic civic partnerships involving anchor institutions. With over 180 members, including 39 college and university presidents, AITF is guided by the core values of collaboration and partnership, equity and social justice, democracy and democratic practice, and commitment to place and community.

Similar organizational developments are also occurring on a global level. These include the formation of the International Consortium for Higher Education, Civic Responsibility, and Democracy (IC) in 1999 to advance the contributions of higher education to democracy on campus, as well as in the local community and the wider society. Working in collaboration with the Council of Europe (47 member countries) through its Committee on Higher Education and Research, the IC undertakes cross-national research projects, joint meetings, and the sharing of best practices as part of its efforts to advance higher education’s contribution to building democratic societies.⁷ The Talloires Network, formed in 2005, is another example of an international association of institutions committed to affirming the civic roles and social responsibilities of higher education.

UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA AS EXAMPLE

The University of Pennsylvania serves as a prime example of the potential of this type of engagement.



Since 1985, the university has increasingly engaged in comprehensive and mutually beneficial university-community-school partnerships. Coordinated by the Barbara and Edward Netter Center for Community Partnerships, for which we both work, more than 160 academically based community service (ABCS) courses (Penn’s approach to service-learning) have been developed. ABCS courses integrate research, teaching, learning, and service around action-oriented, community problem solving. For example, university students work on improving local schools, spurring economic development on a neighborhood scale, and building strong community organizations. At the same time, they reflect on their service experience and its larger implications (e.g., why poverty, racism, and crime exist). In 2011-2012, more than 1,600 Penn students (undergraduate, graduate, and professional) and 56 faculty members (from 20 departments across six of Penn’s 12 schools) were engaged in West Philadelphia through these courses. (This represents significant growth since 1992, when three faculty members taught four ABCS courses to approximately 100 students.)

The Netter Center has been working for 20 years on the idea of university-assisted community schools.

“Community schools” bring together multiple organizations and their resources to educate, activate, and serve not just students but all members of the community in which the school is located. This idea essentially extends and updates John Dewey’s theory that the neighborhood school can function as the core neighborhood institution—the one that provides comprehensive services, galvanizes other community institutions and groups, and helps solve the myriad of problems communities confront in a rapidly changing world. Dewey recognized that if the neighborhood school were to function as a genuine community center, it would require additional human resources and support. But to our knowledge, he never identified universities as a key source of sustained

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support for community schools. We emphasize “university-assisted” because we have become convinced that universities, indeed “higher eds” in general, are uniquely well-positioned to provide strategic, comprehensive and sustained support for community schools.

University-assisted community schools engage students, grades pre-K through 20, in real-world community problem solving designed to have positive effects on neighborhoods and help develop active, participating citizens of a democratic society. University-assisted community school programs occur during the school day, after school, evenings, Saturdays, and summers. Each school site has, at a minimum, one full-time coordinator who works closely with the school and the community to determine activities that best serve the specific needs and interests of that area. In addition to organizing and overseeing the programs, community school

coordinators serve as liaisons between the university and the school, as well as between school day teachers and the after-school program. University students taking ABCS courses, work-study students, and student volunteers provide vital support for these programs, serving as tutors, mentors, classroom fellows, or activity and project leaders. The Netter Center is working with a network of seven university-assisted community schools in West Philadelphia, reaching more than 4,000 K-12 children, youth, and their families each year.

The Moelis Access Science program exemplifies the reciprocal partnerships that Penn is developing through university-assisted community schools. Begun in 1999 with initial support from the National Science Foundation, Moelis Access Science (MAS) works to improve science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) education of both K-12 students and undergraduate and graduate students at Penn. Faculty and students from across campus provide content-based professional development for teachers and direct classroom support for implementing quality hands-on and small group activities. For example, Community Physics Initiative is an ABCS course taught by Department of Physics and Astronomy Chair Larry Gladney that links the practical and theoretical aspects of fundamental physics and is aligned with the School District of Philadelphia’s curriculum for introductory high school physics. By creating and teaching weekly laboratory exercises and classroom demonstrations at nearby University City High School, Penn students are learning science by teaching science to high school students while making contributions to physics education research and practice.

MAS is just one component of the university-assisted community school model being implemented at University City High School, which engages a range of Penn and West Philadelphia partners and resources. For example, the school is home to a number of additional academically based community service courses in disciplines such as Anthropology, Biology, Computer Science, Education, Environmental Science, History, Math, and Urban Studies; a student success center that provides academic support, leadership development, career exposure, post-secondary planning, and social support; job

training and youth leadership programs in urban agriculture and peer nutrition education; and a business school curriculum developed by Wharton faculty and students that includes lessons in entrepreneurship, financial literacy, and decision-making.

Looking forward, community colleges, colleges, and universities should make solving universal problems that are democratically identified within the community and are manifested locally, a very high institutional priority.

Similar programs operate at Sayre High School, with the addition of a school-based, federally qualified health center. The Netter Center’s development of the Sayre Health Center is a concrete example of the application of John Dewey’s theory of “the school as social center” at one of Penn’s university-assisted community schools in West Philadelphia.⁸

In 2002, a group of undergraduates at Penn participating in an academically based community service seminar focused their research and service on one of the most important problems identified by members of the West Philadelphia community—the issue of health. The students’ work with the community ultimately led them to propose establishing a center focused on health promotion and disease prevention at a public school in West Philadelphia, the Sayre Middle School (which completed a 4-year district transition to become a high school and graduate its first senior class in 2008).

From their research, the students learned that community-oriented projects often flounder because they lack stable resources. The students concluded that they could accomplish their goal

by integrating issues of health into the curricula at schools at Penn and at the Sayre School itself. They emphasized that the creation of a health promotion and disease prevention center at the school could serve as a learning venue for Penn students across all disciplines. The Sayre Health Center was formally opened in 2007. Today, it functions as a central component of a university-assisted community school designed both to advance student learning and democratic development, and to help strengthen families and institutions within the community. Penn faculty members and students in medicine, nursing, dentistry, social policy and practice, arts and sciences, and design now work at the Sayre School through new and existing courses, internships, and research projects. Health promotion and service activities are also integrated into the Sayre students’ curriculum. In effect, Sayre students serve as agents of health care change in the Sayre neighborhood.

It is essential to emphasize that the university-assisted community schools now being developed at Penn and elsewhere—such as Florida International University, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, University at Buffalo, and University of Maryland, Baltimore—have a long way to go before they can fully mobilize the powerful, untapped resources of their own institutions and of their communities, including those found among individual neighbors and in local institutions (such as businesses, social service agencies, faith-based organizations, and hospitals). This will require more effective coordination of governmental and nonprofit funding streams and services. How to conceive that organizational revolution, let alone bring it about, poses extraordinarily complex intellectual and social challenges. But as Dewey argued, working to solve complex, real-world problems is the best way to advance knowledge and learning, as well as the general capacity of individuals and institutions to do that work.⁹

LEARNING BY DOING

Studies of the Netter Center’s work have found positive outcomes for both Penn and West Philadelphia. For example, Penn undergraduates taking academically based community service (ABCS) courses were compared to those in similar courses without a community engagement component: 47% percent of ABCS students reported an increase in

research skills versus 36% of non-ABCS students. Additionally, students in ABCS courses more often reported an increase in their abilities to act morally, be a community leader, develop a philosophy of life, develop a concern about urban communities, and volunteer in the community.

Penn students participating as fellows in the Netter Center's Moelis Access Science program also reported positive outcomes: 95% reported an increased ability to present science and math ideas; 100% reported an increase in communication skills; 95% reported increased ability to work with adolescents; and almost half (45%) of new undergraduate fellows indicated that their experience with the program would be influential in their thinking about their career, indicating the possibility of teaching or entering the field of education.

Teacher and student surveys were also collected on 466 K-8 students enrolled in one of four after school programs operated by the Netter Center during the 2009-10 school year. Teachers reported that, of the participating students who needed to improve, 72% showed improvement in their academic performance and 66% of students improved their participation in class. The majority of K-8 students indicated that involvement in the after school program helped them with homework (95%), increased their confidence (92%), helped them do better in school (91%), and increased their interests in school day learning and school day attendance (83% and 73%, respectively).

The Netter Center also operates college access and career readiness programs at three high schools in West Philadelphia, including the Student Success Center at University City High School, which was established in 2010 with funding provided by the Department of Labor. As reported by the School District of Philadelphia's Office of Accountability, University City High School's on-track-to-graduation rate increased from 17.1% in 2010 to 58% in 2011.

Penn has also received significant recognition for its civic and community partnerships, particularly under the leadership of President Amy Gutmann.

For example, the University has twice received the Presidential Award of the President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll (the highest federal honor a college or university can receive for its commitment to community service).

The federal government can and should be a catalyst for new civic partnerships between higher education and local institutions.

Along with the University of Southern California, Penn was named "Best Neighbor" university in the national report, "Saviors of our Cities: 2009 Survey of Best College and University Civic Partnerships." The Netter Center also received the inaugural W.T. Grant Foundation Youth Development Prize that was selected by the National Academy of Sciences in 2003. This award honored the university-assisted community school program for its "high-quality, evidence-based collaborative efforts that generate significant advances in knowledge while increasing the opportunities for young people to move successfully through adolescence with ample support and care."

Syracuse, Widener, and Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI), as well as many other institutions across the country, have demonstrated a variety of innovative ways higher eds can effectively partner with their local communities.¹⁰ Much more, of course, remains to be done. Looking forward, community colleges, colleges, and universities should make solving universal problems that are democratically identified within the community and are manifested locally (substandard housing, inadequate healthcare, unequal schooling, etc.) a very high institutional priority. Their contributions to these solutions should count heavily both in assessing their institutional performance and in responding to their requests for renewed or increased resources and financial support. Government is indispensable in this process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Through financial incentives and the bully pulpit, government should encourage community colleges, colleges, and universities to do well by doing good—that is, to better realize their missions by contributing significantly to developing and sustaining democratic schools and communities.

Specific steps for the federal government to help catalyze Higher Education-Civic Partnerships include:

1. Create a multi-agency, multi-sector federal commission designed to help forge civic partnerships between colleges and universities and their surrounding communities. The commission would be comprised of local, state, and national government officials (including governors and mayors), as well as leaders from the private sector and higher education. The commission should convene a National Summit or White House Conference on Higher Education-Civic Partnerships that would help spur both a national conversation and appropriate action at all governmental levels and serve as a platform to challenge higher educational institutions to realize their democratic missions. It would, in effect, have a similar function to the 1947 President's Commission on Higher Education, which President Truman "charged with the task of defining the responsibilities of colleges and universities in American democracy and in international affairs."¹¹ This commission's mission would be to put democratic devolution to work.
2. The Commission should develop strategies for coordinating federal programs and funding streams to help catalyze the formation of local coalitions of civic partners, including higher educational institutions. (Three Obama administration policy initiatives designed to revitalize distressed communities through place-based partnerships—Promise Neighborhoods, Choice Neighborhoods, and Strong Cities, Strong Communities—involve colleges and universities as possible partners and begin to move in the right direction.)
3. The Commission should promote regional consortia of higher educational institutions

dedicated to improving schooling and community life. For example, Philadelphia Higher Education Network for Neighborhood Development [PHENND] is a consortium of 33 colleges and universities in the greater Philadelphia area that works to revitalize local communities and schools and foster civic responsibility among the region's colleges and universities. Another example is the Higher Ed Forum of Northeastern Oklahoma, an anchor institution consortium of nine community colleges, colleges, and universities that is developing university-assisted community school partnerships with all high schools in Tulsa Public Schools as well as the Union and Broken Arrow School Districts of Tulsa County.

4. Create prestigious Presidential Awards for outstanding local and regional Higher Education-Civic Partnerships to provide recognition and further legitimize the work. Awards would be given to partnerships that make significant, sustained contributions to improving the quality of life in the community and the quality of research, teaching, learning, and service on campus.
5. Provide support for higher education-civic partnerships that demonstrate community benefit, not simply benefit to the college or university, as well as transparent and democratic collaborations with local partners. In effect, federal support would be based on what we have termed the "Noah Principle"—funding given for building arks (producing real change), not for predicting rain (describing the problems that exist and will develop if actions are not taken).

CONCLUSION

The noted Penn psychologist Martin E. P. Seligman coined the term "learned helplessness" in the late 1960s to describe passive and defeatist attitudes and behaviors that result from repeated failure. It is a truism that overcoming feelings of learned helplessness among the poor and disadvantaged is crucial if their lives are to be made better. It should also be a truism that overcoming learned helplessness in our institutions of higher education is essential for solving community, particularly urban, problems. In recent years, as we have discussed, learned

engagement has developed among an increasing number of higher educational institutions. But that engagement needs to be both deeper (more significant, serious, and sustained) and wider (involving many more high eds).

Although gridlocked on large matters of national policy, the federal government can and should be a catalyst for new civic partnerships between higher education and local institutions. Washington may be broke in many ways, but America's colleges and universities constitute a still largely untapped reservoir of talent, expertise and resources that can be put to use strengthening the communities around them.

APPENDIX: OTHER COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES AS EXAMPLES

Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) was founded in 1969 to serve as Indiana's urban research and academic health sciences campus. Civic engagement is part of the institution's founding mission and, under current Chancellor Charles Bantz, continues to be emphasized as a central component not only for student learning, but also for helping the local community. The Center for Service and Learning (CSL) helps create opportunities for faculty to work together and sustain their community-based research, as well as increasingly align their work with community-identified goals. CSL's Office of Neighborhood Partnerships has sustained strong, multi-stakeholder K-12 partnerships. One of IUPUI's longest-standing partners, George Washington Community School, has experienced dramatic success: by 2009, 100% of the school's graduating seniors were accepted into postsecondary education (in a neighborhood where only 5% of residents age 25 or older have a higher education degree). In 2008, IUPUI received the first federal Full-Service Community School funding—\$2.4 million out of a national total of \$4.9 million (the other \$2.5 million was divided between nine school communities across the country).¹²

Syracuse University is a private research university established in 1860 in Syracuse, New York,

whose multifaceted civic engagement focuses on K-12 education, urban revitalization, and green development. The university is a key partner in the Near West Side Initiative, a collaborative effort to rehabilitate and revitalize the Near West Side community through arts, culture, and technology—building on the specific strengths of the institution and the values of the community. Syracuse is also leading a citywide initiative to create cutting-edge cultural development that connects University Hill with downtown Syracuse, known as the Connective Corridor. Working with the Syracuse City School District and other partners, the university is a critical partner in the Say Yes to Education program, which provides comprehensive supports to every public school student, with a promise of free college tuition at more than 23 private institutions and 100 New York public institutions. These efforts draw collaborators from all sectors including business, neighborhood, government, schools, and nonprofit organizations. Through such initiatives, Syracuse has strategically leveraged its intellectual resources to stimulate redevelopment in its local community under President Nancy Cantor's vision of "Scholarship in Action."

Widener University, founded in 1821, is the second largest employer in Chester, Pennsylvania. In the early 2000s, the university was facing severe challenges, including declining enrollment, isolation from the surrounding neighborhood, and major crime. In 2002, under the new presidential leadership of James Harris, Widener re-focused its mission and vision to deeply integrate the community into the university's curriculum. For example, in partnership with community leaders and Chester residents, Widener University launched the Widener Partnership Charter School in 2006 to serve families and their children in the Chester-Upland School District. Widener's School of Human Services Professions provides counseling services for parents and professional development for teachers. Widener collaborates with Swarthmore, Cheyney, Newman, Delaware State, and Penn State through the College Access Center, a 501(c)3 that serves over 400 families by providing free educational services to students beginning in sixth grade through senior year of high school, and to adults wishing to pursue or complete a college degree.¹³

ENDNOTES

1. From the Morrill Act of 1862 to the 1944 G.I. Bill to post World War II support for scientific research and development, federal funding has played an influential role in the organizational culture and structure of both public and private higher educational institutions. In recent years, significant cutbacks have occurred, but the influence remains, with over \$228 billion in federal dollars going to colleges and universities in FY12. (For Fiscal Year 2012 appropriations, see “Details of Obama’s Fiscal-2013 Budget for Higher Education,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Feb. 13, 2012, available at <http://chronicle.com/article/Table-Details-of-Obamas/130771/>.)
2. John W. Gardner, “Remarks to the Campus Compact Strategic Planning Committee,” San Francisco, February 10, 1998.
3. Center for Educational Research and Innovation, “The University and the Community: The Problems of Changing Relationships, Paris: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development,” 1982, p. 127.
4. The college Franklin envisioned broke radically with the classical tradition and gave instruction entirely in the vernacular language. Instead of imitating English colleges, Franklin theorized, an American college’s curriculum, methodology and texts should be appropriate for the education and development of American youth. For a college in Philadelphia to insist on instruction in Latin and Greek and a curriculum dominated by intensive study of classical texts in their original languages, Franklin believed, simply exemplified the disastrous tendency “in mankind [to] an unaccountable prejudice in favor of ancient Customs and Habitudes, which inclines to a continuance of them after the circumstances, which formerly made them useful, cease to exist.” Meyer Reinhold, “Opponents of Classical Learning in America During the Revolutionary Period,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 112 (4), 1968, p. 224. A “prejudice in favor of ancient Customs and Habitudes,” in our judgment, continues to function as a primary obstacle to the radical transformation of research universities into democratic, engaged, cosmopolitan institutions. Moreover, powerful incentives exist (career advancement, financial support among them) to focus on internal disciplinary issues and concerns and to neglect working to solve real-world community problems.
5. Charles W. Anderson, *Prescribing the Life of the Mind*, Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993, p. 7-8.
6. Campus Compact, “Deepening the roots of civic engagement: Campus Compact 2011 Annual Membership Survey Executive Summary,” Boston, MA: Campus Compact, 2012.
7. Author Ira Harkavy serves as chair of both the Anchor Institutions Task Force, and the US Steering Committee of the International Consortium for Higher Education, Civic Responsibility, and Democracy.
8. John Dewey, “The School as Social Centre,” in *The Middle Works of John Dewey, 1899–1924*, vol. 2, ed. Jo Ann Boydston, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978, p. 80–93.
9. Lee Benson, Ira Harkavy, and John Puckett, *Dewey’s Dream: Universities and Democracies in an Age of Education Reform*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007, p. 79.
10. See Appendix for brief descriptions of the innovative partnerships developed by these three universities and their communities.
11. Francis Wilson Smith and Thomas Bender, Editors, *American Higher Education Transformed, 1940-2005: Documenting the National Discourse*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008, p. 84.
12. In 2001, IUPUI received a grant from the Netter Center to adapt its university-assisted community school model (one of 23 schools participating in this national replication project), and in 2011, it was selected to serve as the Netter Center’s second multi-state regional training center on university-assisted community schools.
13. Author Ira Harkavy is a member of the Board of Trustees at Widener University and chair of the board’s Civic Engagement Committee.

Photo credits: Tommy Leonardi

About the Progressive Policy Institute



The Progressive Policy Institute (PPI) is an independent research institution that seeks to define and promote a new progressive politics in the 21st century. Through research, policy analysis and dialogue, PPI challenges the status quo and advocates for radical policy solutions.

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