

Minutes: Reinvention Center Northeast Regional Network Meeting
December 15, 2000

The first meeting of northeastern research universities sponsored by the Reinvention Center took place on December 15, 2000 at the University Club in New York City. It was attended by 36 faculty and senior administrators from 18 public and private institutions. A list of attendees is attached.

Wendy Katkin, Director of the recently-established Center, opened the meeting by introducing herself, and providing background on the Center's founding and on the factors leading to this first network meeting. The purpose, she explained, was to explore the merits and feasibility of creating a regional network made up of faculty and senior administrators from research universities within the same broad geographic area. In addition to the New York City meeting, the Center is holding similar sessions in Washington, DC, San Francisco and Chicago.

Dr. Katkin explained that when the Reinvention Center was created a year ago, she was given three years to determine whether a Center focusing exclusively on research universities made sense and, if so, what its role might be. After a year of visiting campuses, talking with colleagues at universities, professional societies and government agencies and attending meetings of education-oriented organizations like the AACU, AAHE and Project Kaleidoscope, she determined that indeed such a Center could fill a critical gap and have many functions. Her reasoning was based on the observation that most existing organizations focusing on undergraduate education are geared primarily for four-year colleges. These colleges, however, start out with different assumptions and have needs and interests that are quite different from those of research universities. As a result, the organizations have generally failed to engage administrators and especially faculty from research universities. A forum made up exclusively of research universities would be able to concentrate on issues specific to their environments and to the demands and expectations of their faculty. Dr. Katkin envisions the proposed networks as small communities made up of colleagues from institutions that face common challenges and who might benefit from working together and sharing experiences. Her model is the group of ten research institutions that received the NSF RAIRE (Recognition Award for the Integration of Research and Education) awards in 1997. Over the past three years, faculty and administrators from these institutions have met informally on numerous occasions, have come to know one another personally and with reference to many of their programs, and they have become valuable resources for one another on a wide variety of issues. Dr. Katkin expressed her hope that the regional network would function in the same way.

Following the opening comments, a representative from each institution present was asked to provide a brief overview of the institution and to identify a pressing issue or educational aspect that the Center network might address. The introductions revealed the diversity within the group, which included small and large, and public and private universities, as well as ones in urban, suburban and rural locations.

The following issues were identified:

- Learning from one another about what works and doesn't work in different institutional settings. All the campuses face problems in terms of translating initiatives (either ones that exist on their own campuses or others that they hear about) into new institutional and programmatic contexts. To decide, for example, whether or not to adopt a program that has worked in one setting into another setting or to scale a good program upward and outward, you need detailed information. Knowing about experiences at other universities could be very helpful.
- Faculty matters. These include: The challenge of involving faculty in new initiatives, particularly with respect to pedagogy; clarifying what is often perceived as the contradictory missions of undergraduate "teaching" and "research," particularly with reference to tenure and promotion; providing appropriate faculty incentives (especially in light of everything universities are now asking of faculty); providing an orientation and guidance for new faculty, including mentoring of junior faculty; getting presidents, provosts, and deans to buy in; and the orientation and training of new TA's, who represent the next generation of faculty.
- Organizational and structural issues. The institutions present offered several models for administering undergraduate education. What factors underlie the particular model adopted? Who is/should be responsible for making policy decisions? curricular decisions? budget allocations? Who is/should be responsible for implementation? Should the administration of undergraduate academic affairs be integrated with student affairs? With graduate education? Would other arrangements such as a coordinator for each undergraduate year work? What are the advantages/disadvantages of the different models?
- Linking the graduate and undergraduate missions. What are the best ways to do this? One example given was an NSF-funded graduate seminar offered at the University at Stony Brook in which graduate students learn and have direct experience designing and supervising research projects that are carried out the following semester by small teams of first-year undergraduates in the University's Women in Science and Engineering program. In its focus on undergraduate research, rather than classroom instruction which is more typical of TA training, the seminar represents a gradual change in the culture of graduate education and is especially valuable in scientific disciplines in which graduate students may not otherwise do much teaching. At the same time, the undergraduates discover new interests and methodological preferences, and they form strong bonds with the graduate students who serve as the research supervisors and informal mentors to them.
- Providing a quality undergraduate education. With respect to broad *curricular matters*, there were four main interests: 1) The first-year experience—what do we hope to accomplish in the first year, what are some of the different models that universities have adopted, and how are they being delivered (i.e. by senior faculty or lecturers); 2) Strategies for creating coherence-- among disciplines and programs and

within general education; 3) Getting the curriculum to look and feel comfortable with interdisciplinary initiatives; and 4) Inquiry-based learning and specifically determining the appropriate balance between lectures and active learning environments.

- With respect to *undergraduate research*, the central issues were: Strategies for getting students more involved in active learning; the need to define clearly what is meant by a “research experience;” distinguishing a research experience from “discovery or inquiry-based learning;” determining the number/percentage of students an institution can reasonably expect to involve in research, as well as the desirability of targeting specific groups; how to involve faculty; addressing the disparity between opportunities for students in the natural sciences and students in the social sciences and humanities.
- Resources: How do you find resources to do all of the above? This question becomes especially urgent when the budget gets tight.
- Assessment: There is a panoply of models. We need to understand what we are measuring, what works and how. A second issue is the extent to which research universities are being driven by new external emphases on assessment and accountability.

The group decided to abandon the formal agenda and focus instead on two questions raised by Bill Green, Dean of the College, University of Rochester:

- What is the “value-added” for students of attending a research university vs. attending a liberal arts college?
- How can a research university avoid the pitfalls of emulating small colleges, which operate on a vastly different scale?

In order to focus on a few urgent matters, Dr. Green asked participants to identify what they felt were the threats to the quality and reputations of research universities. Four main issues emerged: assessment, the use of part-time faculty, the role of politics, and the unique nature of a research university itself.

1. Assessment: Assessment is paramount. Research universities need to guide the assessment enterprise so that it is synergistic with and supports their goals. We need to use assessment to help us with respect to what we do with our students *and* to help alleviate public misunderstandings about research universities. Research universities are unique in that they have researchers to develop tools and instruments that measure students’ broad skills and cognitive development over time, and not content/ regurgitation of facts.

Research universities are good at assessing research, but less experienced in assessing students’ learning in meaningful ways; thus we run the risk of letting outsiders set the goals and of being influenced by politically-motivated “outcomes” assessment. Dr. Joan Secord Bennett of the University of Delaware described the complexities of carrying out

a major assessment. To do a good study you need a large database and a large control group as well as highly experienced researchers. You can't "just hire an assessor," but need to help develop the appropriate assessment instrument(s) for what you want to know. Delaware has created an epistemological assessment instrument in order to measure the direction of students' cognitive development over time (the UDAES study).

Dr. Matthew Santirocco, Dean of Arts and Sciences at NYU, noted that the AAU has set assessment as one of the goals of its Presidential Leadership forum, via a grant from the Pew Trusts. The AAU is looking at assessment from an admissions standpoint and trying to determine what universities expect incoming students to be able to do and what the standards are for success. What value do they place on cognitive skills? On content? He noted that what we expect students to be able to do has implications for the type of experiences we expect to offer them. The Center network might have a conversation parallel to the AAU's conversation on this issue, but which extends beyond the AAU's admissions focus and involves research universities that are not members of the AAU.

2. The growing use of poorly-paid, part-time, non-tenure-track faculty, including many who are or were graduate students at our own institutions. Frequently, this growth has resulted from an attempt to follow a small-college model and provide small classes for all students. This model however may not be appropriate or workable at a research university. Moreover, it diverts research universities from what they do best.

A related concern articulated by several of those present is the possibility of freshman or lower-division general-education courses being spun off into a separate division from the rest of the university and taught by a separate, fixed-term (non-tenured) faculty who are often not involved in the research university's major activities.

3. Politics and how it impacts universities. Although none of the public institutions present received more than about 30% of their funding from the state, state-appointed boards or agencies are increasingly intruding on their educational mission. In New York State, for example, the SUNY Board of Trustees has recently instituted its own requirements for general education on all SUNY campuses. In a similar way, governing boards may impact private institutions. Such intrusions raise two questions: Who speaks for universities, and how can/should research universities deal with external pressures?

4. The need to understand and make clear what students are getting out of a research university that they could not get elsewhere. Returning to the "value-added" theme Dr. Green raised earlier, the group focused on the importance of research universities creating a vision of undergraduate education that parallels the vision they have successfully created for graduate education and that engages the public imagination. In contrast with liberal arts colleges, which enjoy a good public image and in many ways have set the commonly-held standard for undergraduate education, research universities have not projected a clear and coherent understanding of the kind of educational experience that they offer nor the unique benefits it bestows. Instead, they are often perceived as large, complex and confusing. Moreover, their emphasis on research and graduate training is often seen in terms of costs to undergraduate education. The problem

is particularly great at public universities which students often attend as a “last resort” because of their accessibility and low costs.

A major challenge for research universities is to develop and articulate a vision that builds on research universities’ strengths and complex missions, including an emphasis on the production of knowledge, to inflect the undergraduate education mission. The vision should make clear the value of size and the choices and vitality that size affords to students. It is the complexity, breadth of knowledge, resources and multiple commitments to a variety of missions that distinguishes them from other institutions. This is their unique niche. As one member of the group suggested, we need a meta-pedagogical strategy, “for letting our undergraduates in on the magnificence of this enterprise”. We know who we are as research universities, but how do we communicate what we can do for undergraduates, and how do we let others know?

Dr. Katkin stressed the importance of working with disciplinary and professional societies in efforts to engage faculty in undergraduate education. Unlike their counterparts at four-year colleges who perceive themselves as members of “the college,” faculty at research universities often identify most strongly with their department or discipline, and their expectations as teachers are driven by the norms of their discipline. This “guild” model was a recurrent theme of the discussion. Professional societies should be powerful allies since it is not in the interest of the guild to turn students off, but to draw them in.

Peter Gold, Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education at the University at Buffalo, suggested that the network also work with organizations such as the American Association for Colleges and Universities (AACU) which have an undergraduate education focus. The consensus was that that may be a long-range goal, but before undertaking linkages with other groups the network should have at least one more meeting and establish its own agenda.

Conclusions:

There was a general consensus among those present that a network made up of research universities offers a rare and valuable opportunity for faculty and administrators directly responsible for undergraduate education at these institutions to speak frankly with one other. The size of the regional meeting was deemed a good one for holding conversations and undertaking some actions.

The network might have several functions:

1. To figure out the core goals of research universities and to articulate and work actively to gain recognition for the kind of undergraduate education they offer.
2. To share and disseminate best practices and strategies and relevant research findings.
3. To serve as a resource for one another.

4. Through joint effort, to be pro-active in responding to political and other issues that affect us and to work to shape the national agenda with respect to undergraduate education.
5. Although it is somewhat early to consider working directly with professional societies (whether disciplinary or educational in nature) or to consider any national meetings or symposia, both of these activities may be long-range goals.

Network members are invited to submit ideas and/or short descriptions of first-year experiences to the Center, for its Web site "Spotlight." Please send them via email to wendy.katkin@sunysb.edu by February 5.

The group determined to have a second meeting, in New York City in June, after the other regional groups have all met once.

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