

Reinvention Center Northeast Regional Network Meeting
New York, New York
June 8, 2001

The second meeting of the northeast regional network of research universities convened by the Reinvention Center took place on Friday June 8 at the University Club in New York City. It was attended by 22 faculty and administrators from 10 institutions. A list of participants is attached.

Wendy Katkin, Director of the Center, began with a report on the Center's first round of regional meetings: in New York, Washington DC, San Francisco, and Chicago. Collectively, they were attended by 156 faculty and senior level administrators from 71 public and private institutions. An additional 52 colleagues from 15 institutions also expressed interest, but were unable to make the particular meeting in their region. The high response rate—70% of all 123 Research I and II universities that offer baccalaureate degrees—suggests the level of interest in an organization focused exclusively on research universities. Among the institutions, 78% are public and 22% are private.

There were two significant differences between the two east coast meetings and the west and midwestern ones. In New York and DC, there was fairly equal representation of public and private institutions; in contrast, the Chicago and San Francisco meetings had mostly public institutions present. In addition, unlike in the east, two groups of the VPs for Undergraduate Studies (or their equivalents) who came to the Chicago and San Francisco sessions already work together: the University of California Vice Chancellors and the VPs for Undergraduate Education from the universities that belong to the CIC (Committee on Institutional Cooperation, composed of the "Big Ten" and the University of Chicago). Thus it may be that for these institutions participation in the Reinvention Center duplicates things they are already doing. It was suggested that the Center come up with a range of ways in which these universities might become involved. For some, especially faculty, who do not take part in the UC and CIC meetings, the regional networks may make great sense. Since the Chicago and San Francisco meetings, individual faculty from UC and CIC institutions have contacted the Center to indicate their interest in staying involved—even if it means attending network meetings in a different region. A second option is for colleagues from UC and CIC institutions to bypass the network meetings, but to participate in various Center sub-groups that are focusing on topics of interest to them. If these institutions choose this option, colleagues in their region who are not from UC or CIC universities may still form their own regional group (as many in the west seem to want to do) or join a network in another region (which appears to be the preference in the midwest). In all cases, members from any region will be welcome to attend any network meeting and join any sub-group. A hybrid arrangement with 3-4 regional networks and cross-network sub-groups would have the benefits of enabling individuals to get to know others in their region/group network well and at the same time have the flexibility to cross networks to work on issues of special interest.

For the most part, discussion at all four meetings centered on the same issues and challenges. The common issues raised reflect recent efforts on virtually all campuses to bridge research universities' traditional emphases on research and graduate training with their new emphasis on undergraduate education and to offer an undergraduate experience that is synergistic with research universities' unique context and environment. The following issues stood out:

- Re-thinking general education so that it provides students with the foundations for their further studies
- Enriching the first-year experience
- Opening up the curriculum to allow for truly interdisciplinary study
- Expanding opportunities for student research and creative activity
- Fostering the development of good written and oral communication skills
- Scaling up, sustaining and coordinating "terrific islands of excellence"
- Creating a sense of community on campus
- Engaging the faculty in undergraduate education and balancing faculty commitments
- Assessment
- Dealing with a persistent shortage of financial resources (public institutions)

In addition, there was a common recognition across networks of the need for research universities first to define and articulate what an undergraduate education at research universities should look like and then to promote this vision. Research universities have begun to recognize this need and in their recruitment efforts are increasingly using language that emphasizes their enormous array of resources and the research opportunities they afford students. This theme, which distinguishes research universities from liberal arts colleges, seems to strike a powerful note among families and the students themselves. The Reinvention Center can play a lead role in sparking discussion and focusing public attention on this theme.

Survey

At the behest of the Boyer Commission, the Center recently surveyed 90 research universities to determine the extent to which the Commission's ten major recommendations have been part of their agendas in the past three years. The recommendations related to:

- Opportunities for research and creative activity
- Inquiry-based teaching
- Collaborative learning
- Freshman seminars
- Integrated first-year program
- Instruction in writing
- Instruction in oral communication
- Capstone courses and senior projects
- Teaching assistant training
- Faculty rewards promoting excellence in undergraduate education

The findings show that research university faculty and administrators are talking and thinking about the way undergraduate education is conceived and delivered to an extent they had not previously done. Four interests have received the greatest attention: 1) Expanding research/creative activities and making them the centerpiece of undergraduate education at research universities; 2) providing a first-year experience that promotes active learning and critical skills development; 3) revamping general education; and 4) improving students' writing abilities. Teaching resource centers have been established to help faculty improve their teaching. Beyond the classroom, the main focus has been on creating small social and academic communities that make large research universities more welcoming and manageable for all undergraduates, but particularly for first year students. Thus far most university efforts have been directed at the best students; the challenge for almost all is to reach a wider spectrum. The problem is particularly acute at public institutions, which have more limited financial resources.

Supportive leadership and structures and resources are necessary to bring about substantive change. Faculty buy-in is also needed. The survey data suggest that campuses have revised their promotion/tenure guidelines to give greater recognition to efforts directed at undergraduates and rewards have been put in place on many campuses for faculty who go the extra step. Most faculty however continue to see research as the critical factor in promotion/tenure decisions and in their gaining national recognition for themselves and their departments.

Activities and Issues

The group thought it would be most useful to choose two or three issues on which to focus, with the goal of producing materials and carrying out other activities that will be useful to network members and research universities more generally.

Possible activities include:

- Developing sub-groups to study specific issues and produce materials such as a manual with strategies on "how to" and case studies.
- Collaborating with disciplinary societies to shape discussion, influence faculty and disseminate information on curricular and non-curricular matters. Collaboration might be informal or it might include activities such as joint workshops or publication of articles in disciplinary association newsletters.
- Working with groups such as the AAU and NRC in offering programs that target specific groups such as chairs.
- Producing a public document on the unique attributes of a research university and the educational experience it can offer, and widely promoting it.

Issues which emerged at the New York meeting and from follow-up emails:

DEPARTMENTAL ISSUES

Departments play a powerful role at research universities and are critical to efforts to improving undergraduate education with respect to curriculum, instruction, and faculty

involvement. The challenge is to engage and work with departments so that they become as aware and cognizant of their teaching mission as they are of their research mission. One strategy is to work through disciplinary channels. Another is for the Center to create networks of faculty within a discipline to facilitate collaborations on teaching that parallel research collaborations. A third approach is to foster wide and deep thinking about pedagogy among the graduate students, who will be the next generation of faculty.

FACULTY ISSUES

Virtually every research university now has a two-tiered teaching staff. The first tier consists of traditional ladder faculty who increasingly are being asked to give attention to their undergraduate teaching and to introduce aspects, such as writing and oral communication skills development, that they cannot or do not know how to teach.

The second tier is the growing number of non-tenure track instructors-- adjuncts, fixed-term lecturers and instructors, professional staff, graduate students and even advanced undergraduates - whom research universities increasingly depend on for general education courses, particularly in writing and languages. This group is often outside the departmental structure and lacks access to many of the resources and rewards (such as merit increases) that regular faculty receive. Equally important, they typically are not researchers. Their growing participation therefore runs counter to current notions of integrating research and education and raises questions about the undergraduate curriculum and specifically the relationship between the content of and approaches to undergraduate education and the research mission. This relationship becomes increasingly important as research universities endeavor to distinguish themselves from liberal arts and comprehensive institutions.

Two questions research universities need to address are: how to engage the full range of instructors productively and in ways consistent with the research mission, and how to ensure that they are good teachers? Underlying both questions is determining what is the appropriate and inappropriate use of tenure/tenure track faculty and non-tenure track faculty. How, for example, should the time of the most productive researchers be allocated? Are we using professional instructors in some areas because they are good or because they are cheap? Disciplinary societies might well be brought into this discussion.

University practices with respect to teaching assignments (who teaches by tier, rank, prestige?), promotion and tenure, policies on faculty buy-out of undergraduate courses, and treatment of non-ladder teaching staff get to the heart of an institution's priorities and inflect faculty and other teaching staff's priorities. Faculty, for example, are likely to give attention to their undergraduate teaching if they know it will be included in their dossiers and taken seriously in promotion and tenure decisions. They will also pay attention if extra efforts are recognized through financial and other rewards. Universities should be clear in delineating the criteria to be used to assess good undergraduate teaching. Ideally, it should go beyond students' class evaluations and include dossiers with syllabi, assignments and other material that give a richer picture. For non-faculty

instructors, there are important issues relating to how they are used, treated and rewarded, as well as issues of accountability.

A final question relates to pedagogy. There appears to be general agreement that good undergraduate teaching at a research university encompasses more than classroom instruction, yet faculty are unclear what that means. While they have a fairly good sense of what constitutes good teaching methods in their research environment -- interaction, questioning, collaboration, oral and written presentations -- they do not see or are unable to transfer those elements into a classroom setting. Nor do they see how the graduate-training model can apply to their undergraduates. Virtually every campus now has a teaching resource center, but faculty have been reluctant to seek them out. The most successful centers are proactive and work with individual faculty as they design, implement and assess courses. Faculty might be more attracted to the centers if they made clear that their faculty development activities are informed by research findings on learning and on effective teaching practices and if they saw their participation as professionally enhancing rather than remedial.

THE FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE

The first year at a large research university is a particularly challenging experience for students because of the sheer size and complexity of the institution. There are many components of the first-year experience and a range of models exist. As institutions begin to focus on the students' first year, it is important to clarify the goals (i.e. a small class experience, interaction with faculty, retention, teaching particular skills, integrating other general education courses) and to articulate the connections the first-year experience will have to the students' subsequent education.

RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS

The research culture is characterized by active, aggressive learning and the generation of knowledge. This culture, typified in models used to train graduate students, should be extended to the full range of undergraduates in a variety of venues (i.e. classroom, labs, field setting, library). Experiences with programs like the McNair Program have demonstrated the transformational effect participation in research can have. While undergraduates are increasingly part of the research effort in laboratory sciences and engineering, largely because of cultural differences and a lack of funding, participation by students in non-laboratory disciplines is quite low. New opportunities are now available however through technology which gives students access to vast quantities of bibliographic and archival information. Universities need to create mechanisms to familiarize students with the network of scholarship that exists in library collections, licensed databases, and scholarly material both within our own institutions and on the Web. Efforts should be made to enlist specialists such as librarians and research scientists in these activities. The Center can play a role in promoting conversations with faculty in non-laboratory disciplines and providing examples of successful model programs and case studies such as those at the University of Delaware (URL: <http://www.udel.edu/UR/ahpage.html>) and the University of Michigan (The Arts of Citizenship program: <http://www.artsofcitizenship.umich.edu/>).

CURRICULAR MATTERS

Faculty: A major question is who has ownership of the curriculum and what is the faculty's connection to it. Faculty need to participate in discussions of curriculum at every level so that they sign on early and fully to the intellectual project of the research university and carry it through, from freshman programs and early experience programs to sophomore experiences to capstone courses. A challenge is to effect this participation.

Students: Research universities need to be clear themselves about their objectives for their students and the desired outcomes, and they need to make these objectives and expected outcomes clear to their students. This clarity should extend from general education to majors, which will have different cultural norms and expectations.

Engineering Schools appear to be ahead of other academic units in providing students with an integrated curriculum and in employing pedagogical techniques based on inquiry, problem-solving, and collaboration. They also place great emphasis on the development of good writing and oral skills and on visual presentation. ABET has been a major factor in compelling Engineering schools to re-think their programs; another factor has been the industrial advisory boards that most Engineering Schools now have.

ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

Responsibility for oversight of the undergraduate experience varies among institutions and within institutions among units, which often set their own requirements. Often there is a separation between the unit that sets the requirements and the unit responsible for delivering the required courses. Student services and academic affairs are commonly separated as well. The administrative arrangement an institution adopts has important implications for resource allocation, delivery of the curriculum, innovation, and the overall quality of the undergraduate experience. Two models dominate: oversight by the academic dean(s) and, more recently, a unified structure led by a Dean or Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies whose charge cuts across units and includes a range of non-academic services. Both models need to be examined, particularly with reference to quality of academic offerings and student services, linkage of the budget planning process to curricular planning, and faculty support.

UNIQUE BENEFITS OF THE RESEARCH UNIVERSITY (see above)

Research universities "self-definition" should include the extent to which the undergraduate experience is shaped by the presence of graduate students and the unique preparation undergraduates receive for further graduate and professional study.

SCALABILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY

Every campus has innovative "islands of excellence" that typically are costly and benefit only a small number of students. While the inclination is often to expand and sustain them, we know very little about the conditions or characteristics that support successful expansion. Are there optimal levels on the scalability and sustainability? Can we develop technical, "econometric" models that might predict scalability and sustainability?

A persistent tension exists between fostering a small number of high-quality innovative programs and making compromises in order to benefit more students.

Many questions need to be addressed: What are the best practices for working within university structures of administration and governance to affect and accomplish wide-scale curricular innovation? Can “innovation” be sustained? If sustainability is the long-term goal, mechanisms for continuing innovation needs to be built into the plans. There is some literature on this, especially as it pertains to sustaining business innovations, which is beginning to be applied to educational initiatives.

ASSESSMENT

Increasingly, legislators, accrediting bodies, and boards of trustees are demanding specific outcomes. Research universities, perhaps led by the Reinvention Center, should draw upon our common expertise to help shape their thinking. This will require our understanding ourselves our desired goals and outcomes for students and faculty alike and our making them explicit. Areas for assessment include both general education and majors as well as other aspects of undergraduate education such as research activities and special programs and courses for first-year students. There already exists much data on our campuses that could and should be useful to us. Who should be responsible for putting it in a useful form and for conducting the range of assessments that institutions may want or be required to carry out?

Conclusions

The Board will write up brief position papers on selected issues and plan some publicity for the activities. If you are interested in working on these issues, either on your campus, with professional/ scholarly associations, or with other network members, or can provide references to any relevant papers, other background materials or effective models, please let Dr. Katkin know.

List of participants:

Binghamton University

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Boston University

Susan Jackson, Senior Associate Dean, Arts and Sciences

Sharon Prado, Executive Director, Teaching Center and Director, UROP

Case Western Reserve University

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