Response

No More Ivory Towers: Connecting the Research University to the Community

Henry Louis Taylor, Jr.

Should the research university be reinvented for public service? This is a powerful and provocative question posed by Barry Checkoway. Set against a backdrop of profound economic, social, and political changes taking place in American society, communities around the nation are faced with a host of serious problems. In this challenging setting, Checkoway believes the federal government's role as a major societal problem solver is changing. Now, problem solving is increasingly being dropped at the doorstep of local communities, where the complicated socioeconomic difficulties facing society are found. In the twenty-first century, the community—not the federal government—will be the principal unit of solution to social and economic difficulties. The big problem, Checkoway argues, is that communities vary in their readiness to assume this role. Some communities are resource rich and will be able to meet the problem-solving challenge, while others are resource poor and will not.

This is where the research university comes in. Checkoway believes the research university is a sleeping giant that, if awakened, can contribute mightily to the problems facing American communities. The research university—with its army of faculty, staff, and students, combined with its libraries, academic departments, and professional schools—represents an unrivaled community resource. Universities are not only transmitters of knowledge and culture, they are economic engines, applied technology centers, investors, real estate developers, employment centers, and "neutral venues" where complex and divisive issues can be deliberated. Without exaggeration, there is no other societal institution with such an armada of talent and resources to focus on the problems challenging America's communities (Taylor 1995).

The obstacle, according to Checkoway, is that the university's talent and resources are not readily accessible to the community. A canyon exists between the research university and the community. So, a bridge must be constructed that connects the two, thereby turning the "ivory tower" into a knowledge-based "oasis" accessible to community residents.

The idea of reinventing the research university for public service is not taking place in a vacuum. This is a defining moment in American life and culture. As we rush toward the twenty-first century, powerful forces are reshaping the nation and culture. Indeed, we have entered a new period in U.S. and world history. As the nation's economy shifts from an industrial to a service base, and as emerging patterns of global competition continue to restructure relations among nations, American society is being transformed in fundamental ways. New social relations are being established among different groups. New attitudes are being forged on the issues of the economy, work, family life, safety and security, governance, equity and fairness, and the role of differ-

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ent institutions. At the same time, downsizing, privatizing, and outsourcing are combining with the shipment of both white- and blue-collar jobs to Third World countries where a growing supply of cheap and highly skilled or unskilled labor is threatening the American dream. Along with this, the "small" government movement and the public demand for lower taxes are creating a crisis for all public sector institutions, including the research university (Brzezinski 1993; Buckley 1993; Post-boomers 1993; West 1993; Wiebe 1967).

In this new setting, many of the values, attitudes, beliefs, and traditions that served America so well in the past have become impediments to future progress by preventing us from approaching unprecedented difficulties and dilemmas from fresh perspectives. A new "re" language has emerged to reflect the growing dysfunction of American institutions: "re" invent, "re" conceptual, "re" think, "re" imagine, and "re" create. As the nation wrestles with these novel problems and difficulties, many of its institutions appear impotent in the face of change. Thus the university is just one of many societal institutions attempting to redefine itself in a national climate of transition and turbulence. Today, most institutions of higher education are facing a broad set of issues such as political and public skepticism; uncertainty of mission and direction; budgetary, programmatic, and quality problems; and general and considerable faculty anxiety. In this setting the research university, like many other societal institutions, must change or risk extinction (Triggle 1996).

In this essay, I will outline several key issues posed by Checkoway in his essay on reinventing the research university and then offer my views on these propositions. In particular, I will elaborate on some of the questions raised, but not satisfactorily answered, by Checkoway. In this regard, my goal is to complement and expound on the important issues he has raised.

ON DEFINING "COMMUNITY" AND "PUBLIC SERVICE"

The concepts of "community" and "public service" are fundamental to the issue of reinventing the research university. Community is defined by Checkoway (1997, 308 [this issue]) as a "process of people acting collectively with others who share some common concern, whether on the basis of a place where they live, of interests or interest groups that are similar, or of relationships that have some cohesion or continuity." This definition is too vague and ambiguous to be useful.

Community is one of those shadowy terms that require careful definition. In 1955, George A. Hillery, Jr., found no fewer than ninety-four meanings attributed to the concept. Yet, despite the variations, over the years most definitions of community have implied something both geographical and sociopsychological and stressed the interaction among proximity and propinquity, social groups, consciousness of kind, socialization, and shared values and institutions operating within the context of territory. These ideas emphasize the interplay among people, place, and social organization—inseparable aspects of the notion of community (Hillery 1955; Taylor and Dula 1993).

In Checkoway's definition, however, community can be either place or people acting independent of place. This is a serious flaw. Community is always territory based. When various interest groups come together to identify and define problems and to formulate and implement plans and policies, their actions—no matter how aspatial they may appear—ultimately affect place, whether it is defined as neighborhood, central city, suburb, region, nation, or global. All ideas and policies, once they become a material force, have impacts on place (Bassand 1990).

The point is that groups exist in relationship to territory, not independent of it. So, by juxtaposing "group" with "community," the stress placed on the interplay among people, place, and social organization is lost. In turn, the door is opened for the university to work with specific groups while sidestepping its paramount responsibility to recreate and rebuild distressed communities inhabited by Blacks, Hispanics, people of color, and working-class Whites. Therefore, losing sight of this nexus between group and place can only lead to missteps, false starts, oversights, and omissions in the formulation and implementation of public service projects.

This question of defining community is not just an idle quibble. In an essay on redefining university-community relations, I argue that universities have never been "isolated" from the so-called community. Indeed, most research universities can list myriad activities in which they are involved with their host communities. The problem is that much of this effort focuses on activities with corporate leaders and members of the private sector, while efforts dealing with central city neighborhoods are poorly funded and often dealt with in a halfhearted and lackadaisical fashion (Taylor 1992).

Public service must focus on solving urgent societal problems. In this regard, the research university has a special responsibility to grapple with the inner-city problems of declining neighborhoods, joblessness, poverty, troubled families and children, poor schools, crime, drug and alcohol addiction, and violence (Taylor 1992). These are territory-based problems. So, too, are the problems found in small towns and rural communities. In our quest to reinvent the research university, there is a need to use a concept that defines community in terms of the interaction among people, place, and community.

Also, on the issue of community, I believe Checkoway needs to flesh out his notion of community as a unit of solution. I do not disagree with his basic premise, but this vague concept seems to place too much empha-

sis on communities solving their problems without building partnerships with government, especially the federal government. Local communities should be the focal point of solving complicated societal problems, but this must happen within a broader national context. In fact, many local problems cannot be solved outside the context of a national framework (Wilson 1987). Essentially, Checkoway needs to make clear how the shift from the federal government as problem solver to the community as problem solver restructures the traditional partnership between local communities and the federal government. How does the community-federal partnership operate in this changed setting?

Checkoway's definition of public service is too abstract, as well. Some elements of that definition are on target. For example, public service should be considered work that draws upon one's professional expertise or academic knowledge and that contributes to the mission of the university. Some very high standards, such as those outlined by Elman and Smock (1985) in *Professional Service and Faculty Rewards*, must be developed to evaluate public service. At the same time, Checkoway's notion of public service as "work that develops knowledge for the welfare of society" needs elaboration (Michigan State University 1993; Sandmann 1996).

Public service should be work based on one's professional knowledge or academic expertise that concentrates on solving significant community problems in an effort to transform society. Currently, local communities are beset with numerous economic, political, and social problems ranging from questions of governance, community and economic development, job creation, and the revitalization of central cities to questions of poverty, violence, and crime. Public service should focus on solving these and other core domestic problems (Harkavy 1996; Taylor 1995).

Further, it should be recognized that many of these difficulties cannot be resolved without bringing about structural changes in society. For example, the writings of Rusk (1993), Peirce (1993), and others suggest that the problems of America's inner cities cannot be solved without the fundamental political reorganization of the urban metropolis and the development of cooperative relations among jurisdictions that call for the sharing of fiscal resources. The work of Wilson (1987) and other urbanists suggests that programs aimed at simply alleviating individual misery (such as feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, or tutoring the slow learner) will not fundamentally change the realities faced by most inner-city residents. To reach this higher, more lofty goal, communities must find bold, innovative ways to create jobs, sustain community economic development, and revitalize distressed neighborhoods. These are questions of social transformation, not reducing the suffering of individuals.

Moreover, distressed neighborhoods cannot simply be rebuilt. They must be reconceptualized and recreated. These neighborhoods were originally built for population groups that no longer occupy them. Over time, as the middle class has fled, all too many central city neighborhoods have become settlements where the poor are concentrated. The resulting social isolation has wreaked havoc in these communities. To overcome these difficulties, we must build cross-class, multicultural communities in which people from across the class and income spectrum live and work together (Wilson 1987).

To reach this goal, a host of complicated social and economic questions must be resolved—including developing an equitable system for property assessment in cross-class neighborhoods, building strong schools, structuring a physical environment that promotes social interaction, encouraging the building of cross-class community development corporations that reinforce the bonds of neighborhood unity, and finding novel ways to grapple with conflicts caused by people from different class backgrounds living together. At the same time, new ways of building the neighborhood economy from the bottom-up must be discovered. I am not just talking about traditional efforts to bolster neighborhood service-providing businesses, but ways to build neighborhood wealth-producing businesses that create jobs and bring new monies into the neighborhood. Again, these are issues of social transformation.

Public service, in a word, must not be allowed to degenerate into "liberal do-goodism," where the goal is to ameliorate individual suffering (e.g., helping Black people get out of the ghetto rather than socially transforming the ghetto and making it a great place to live and work). Most research universities can list an impressive array of projects designed to assist in the development of their host communities. Yet university participation in community life has not led to strategies and programs that have succeeded in arresting or solving the myriad economic and social problems besetting such places. It is both paradoxical and ironic that great research universities like Johns Hopkins, Chicago, and Columbia jut out of landscapes of decay, decline, and hopelessness (Taylor 1992).

Public service must move beyond liberal do-goodism and alleviating individual misery to activities that concentrate on solving complex domestic problems and transforming society. As Harkavy (1996, 6) of the University of Pennsylvania puts it, public service "requires a comprehensive institutional response that engages the broad range of resources of the urban university to solve the strategic problem of our time—the problem of creating democratic, local, cosmopolitan communities." This type of thinking must be used to augment and expound on Checkoway's (1997, 307) concept of "knowledge for the welfare of society."

RECONCEPTUALIZING RESEARCH AND TEACHING FOR PUBLIC SERVICE

Checkoway argues that the existing model of research that dominates universities is limited and that it must be reconceptualized and broadened to include other forms of knowing, with an emphasis on the production of socially useful knowledge. I agree. However, I want to add texture to his argument. Three elements must be included in the development of such a paradigm of service-based research.

First, interdisciplinary research teams that engage in both basic and applied research must be formed. The problems facing American communities are complex and interactive. Consequently, if problems are treated in isolation from each other, efforts to solve them will either fail or meet with only limited success. This means that scholars working alone within narrow disciplinary boundaries will not be able to produce the type of knowledge required to solve the core problems facing American society. Only interdisciplinary teams of researchers can accomplish this task.

Second, within this framework, problem-centered basic and applied research forms the foundation of the service-based research model. Researchers need to engage in the systematic, purposeful study of the past and present to gain insight into contemporary economic, political, and social problems. For example, research teams could focus on issues such as building cross-class neighborhoods, governing the urban metropolis, and creating sustainable economic development in central city neighborhoods. They would engage in long-term historical and contemporary studies to gain knowledge and insight into these issues. The outcome of these scholarly inquiries would lead to the formulation and implementation of intervention strategies.

This approach to research links basic and applied research, and connects both to intervention strategies. This creates circumstances that allow for the testing of ideas in a real-world setting. In this way, an interactive relationship is established between theory and practice and between knowing and doing. This type of research process will enable scholars to produce a body of useful knowledge that is continually enriched and applied to solving societal problems (Taylor 1995).

Third, in this model, the community is actively involved in both the production of knowledge and in the development and use of intervention strategies. Here, the idea is to develop projects that bind scholarship to the invention of strategies to confront the core problems facing communities. In this way, the university and community can interact on joint initiatives, producing a synergism that would not exist if they acted alone, in isolation from one another.

The State University of New York at Buffalo's Center for Urban Studies (CENTER), for example, is working on such a project with the Office of Urban Initiatives, Inc. (OUI), a nonprofit community development corporation. The purpose of the collaboration is to develop an economic development strategy for Buffalo's minority community that is centered on business development and community education. OUI has already initiated several programs along this line, and the university is assisting in their long-term development.

The team working on these programs consists of three scholars from the CENTER and eighteen members of the OUI board, including its executive director. The idea is to study the existing state of OUI programs and then use basic and applied research to guide their future development. The scholars will be deeply immersed in the activities of the organization, including participation in project planning and development activities as well as in conducting research. In this interactive process of research and project implementation, the experiences gained from real-world activities will be used to generate hypotheses to guide future basic and applied research.

TEACHING

Checkoway indicates that public service should be interwoven with curriculum so that classroom activities are "stitched" to community and economic development activities. He views service learning as the vehicle for developing this service-based curriculum and defines it as "a pedagogy in which students serve the community and learn from the experience" (Checkoway 1997, 314). As a consequence of engagement in everyday life and culture in communities, Checkoway argues, students acquire ethical standards, social responsibility, and civic competence. So, in this model, the goal of service learning is primarily to educate college students for citizenship.

This concept of service learning must be broadened to make solving core community problems, not good citizenship, its focal point. Here, the point is not simply to produce "civically conscious" students but to develop students who view education as a means for both earning a living and creating a world worth living in; students who want to change the world for the better and who view knowledge as a vehicle for achieving this goal; students who will be ashamed to die until they have won several victories for humanity (Harkavy 1996).

In this model of service learning, students become active participants in the process of bringing about *structural change* in communities. In this process of changing society, they acquire knowledge and understanding of the core problems confronting communities and the obstacles holding back the communities' development. When such students graduate, they will be better equipped and more committed to the profoundly

difficult and complex task of transforming American society. So, in this model, the goal is to turn service learning into a pedagogy that stresses problem solving and inculcates students with the lifelong commitment to transform society.

LEADERSHIP, FACULTY INVOLVEMENT, AND CULTURAL CHANGE

Checkoway argues that leadership for the university's public service is a shared responsibility involving the university president, vice presidents and other administrative officers, key members of the faculty, and students. The notion of shared responsibility means that leadership must come from all segments of the university, with each group playing an important, but different, role in the attempt to use public service as the vehicle for connecting the university to the community. Unless this happens, Checkoway implies, the public service effort will eventually falter.

Even so, unless the president takes the lead and a campuswide unit is established with the mission of involving faculty in public service activities, changing university culture, and coordinating and directing public service, the goal of reinventing the research university for public service will not succeed. In places where the public service idea has taken root, institutional frameworks have been set up that encourage and support the efforts of departments, faculty, and staff to use their professional expertise and academic knowledge to find solutions to the complicated problems confronting society.

University presidents play the decisive role in leading the public service movement at the research university. In these times of budgetary constraints and uncertainty over the mission and direction of the university, deans and faculty expect the president to set the institution's priorities and agenda, especially which activities will be valued and supported and which ones will not. The president must issue the clarion call for professors, staff, and students to seek solutions to the community's core problems by becoming involved in community life. In the current university environment of fiscal restraint and uncertainty, if the president does not endorse and give full support to the public service mission, it will be difficult—although not impossible—to make outreach a central aspect of university life. Therefore, in the quest to reinvent the research university, winning presidential support for public service must be a top priority.

Within this framework, a struggle must be undertaken to win university-wide consensus on a definition of public service and how to evaluate it. This must be the starting point in the struggle to change university culture and to involve faculty, staff, and students in public service. Perhaps the best place to start this process is with the faculty senate. Here, a committee should be formed to lead the discussion over defining and evaluating public service. This debate, however, should not involve just the senate. Rather, an assortment of activities, including forums, workshops, and meetings with deans and chairs, should be set up to discuss public service. These discussions should be held with faculty and also with professional staff and students. In addition to focusing on the faculty senate, faculty members who support the public service idea should be asked to play a leadership role in these activities. Also, on many campuses, professional schools—because of their emphasis on studio courses, internships, applied research, and consultation with community groups—may be an important booster.

Ultimately, to operationalize the model of public service outlined in this essay, a special administrative unit must be created with the power and authority to lead the effort to change university culture; involve faculty members in public service; and direct, focus, and coordinate community outreach. I want to emphasize the critical importance of developing a strategic plan for carrying out public service. In other words, public service must be viewed in terms of formulating intervention strategies, in which the activities of faculty, staff, and students are deliberately focused on specific problems. Problem-based work on core community problems should be informed by a carefully devised intervention strategy.

Random acts of liberal do-goodism will not solve complicated community problems. Most research universities can boast of an assortment of projects that deal with various aspects of community problems. The State University of New York at Buffalo, for example, recently published a compendium of public service initiatives. These activities covered a wide range of projects, including technical assistance to businesses, government, and neighborhood groups, along with research initiatives addressing major health, educational, and social issues. However, a collection of well-run, brilliantly conceived but disjointed and uncoordinated projects, implemented without any overarching theoretical and conceptual framework, will not halt the decline of Buffalo's central city or help the region meet the enormous economic, political, and social problems it faces. If, on the other hand, these individual efforts are fused together by creating opportunities for greater collaboration, which will forge a common vision of the type of community we want to build and create a forum where knowledge and insights can be shared, then our projects will have much greater impact.

Finally, the greatest obstacle to reinventing the university for public service is the current reward system that guides tenure and promotion decisions. This reward system must be broadened to include public ser-

vice. Unless faculty truly believe their public service efforts will be rewarded, the number of those who participate in public outreach will remain relatively small. Although there are many aspects of university culture that must be changed before the public service idea will truly grow, transforming the reward system is the most crucial change to make (Bok 1982).

CONCLUSION

Reinventing the research university for public service is an extraordinarily difficult, but not impossible, task. Over the past five years, we have seen enormous progress along these lines, especially among public universities. For example, in 1995, when the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Office of University Partnerships issued a call for universities to identify outstanding examples of universities working in partnerships with their local communities, more than 250 initiatives were submitted (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development 1995). Moreover, at the 1996 annual meeting of the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, college presidents discussed the importance of public service and ways to make it an integral part of university life. Even so, there still are no models of universities successfully working in their host communities, although there are a number of excellent experiments taking place (Harkavy 1996). So, while efforts to reinvent the research university will continue to encounter resistance, slowly the university will change. It will change because there are no other realistic alternatives.

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