



## **One Vision, Many Voices: Creating a Climate for Lasting Change**

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**T**ransforming an academic culture based on a "publish or perish" mindset into an environment marked by a flexible approach to faculty roles and rewards and by the integration of scholarship in all its forms with community needs constitutes one of the great leadership challenges in contemporary higher education. At Kent State, a Research II University serving thirty thousand students, the challenge has been addressed in an ongoing, public process of reevaluating "scholarship" and "scholar;" identifying institutional values; and revising our mission, academic policies, and strategic plan accordingly. After seven years of dialogue, analysis, and experimentation, an appreciation for the diversity of faculty work and for the need for multiple faculty roles to fulfill a multifaceted mission is taking hold across the university's eight campuses. In turn, the status of teaching and outreach scholarship has been heightened considerably.

Early in our discussions, the faculty senate advocated a set of principles for evaluating and rewarding scholarship that incorporates all aspects of scholarship (Faculty Senate Commission on Scholarship 1992); several departments' evaluation criteria weigh scholarly activities according to the individual's role in the department; and new promotion and tenure policies (Kent State University Board of Trustees 1996, 1997) are based on the premise that what matters most about faculty work are quality and relevance to unit and university mission.

This "permission" to pursue diverse scholarship has been manifested in many innovative outreach projects from colleges, departments, and department-based centers with a history of participation in outreach activities as well as those not traditionally associated with outreach. For example, faculty in our Applied Psychology Center are working with an urban hospital and city health department to develop a promising AIDS-prevention program; faculty in political science, sociology, Pan-African Studies, and education are providing conflict-management training to twenty-four hundred residents of Cleveland Metropolitan Housing estates; and speech

pathology faculty are helping preschool teachers use technologies that help children with disabilities. Such projects have created an expanding group of faculty that views outreach scholarship as a

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As with all cultural transformation, the changing status of outreach scholarship on Kent's campuses is part of an ongoing, multi-step process. At the start of the decade, Kent State subscribed to the prevailing cultural canon under which research eclipsed other functions in its centrality to promotion, tenure, and professional prestige. Sparked by the broadened definition of scholarship articulated by Ernest Boyer (1990) and by

increasing public calls for accountability, a pilot study of faculty work was conducted in 1992 as part of a state-mandated study of the efficiency and effectiveness of public colleges and universities (Kent State University Managing for the Future Task Force 1992). The study yielded striking proof of the diversity of scholarly activities across disciplines, and about the complementary nature of research, teaching, and outreach. At the same time, the university community began revising Kent State's mission statement and developing the institution's first, comprehensive strategic plan (Committee for University-Wide Strategic Planning 1994). During the two-year strategic-planning process, Kent State was one of thirty U.S. institutions invited to form a campus roundtable under the auspices of the Pew Higher Education Roundtable program; the Faculty Senate began a discussion of Boyer's pivotal monograph. In each of these initiatives, outreach was reaffirmed as among the university's primary missions for the remainder of the 1990s and beyond.

A new round of strategic planning is about to begin to ensure that institutional goals remain relevant and realistic. In designing a framework for this university-wide effort, questions arose about how to engage a large cohort of new faculty members in the planning process. Most of these faculty were hired to fill positions vacated through a five-year, early-retirement program that ended in 1997 and encouraged the retirement of more than three hundred faculty

members. Most vacated positions have been restored or reallocated to areas targeted for emphasis in the original strategic plan.

Discussions about the critical role of new faculty in strategic planning led to the larger questions of how to foster a sense of institutional "ownership" among the academic community in general; how to ensure the continuation of efforts to revitalize scholarship and realign institutional goals and faculty roles; and how to effect an appropriate balance between academic autonomy and public accountability. Some senior faculty members are particularly concerned with the latter, and have expressed concern that the scholarly tradition that attracted them to academic life is being eroded by external pressures from competition for students to legislative attacks on tenure to media coverage that frequently misrepresents faculty productivity. In grappling with these complex concerns, it became clear that accurate and up-to-date information about campus culture was needed. An in-depth analysis of organizational culture would not only provide insights about how to

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engage new faculty in institutional life, it would identify strongly held beliefs and values that could help bolster the sense of academic culture and community. Most importantly, it would be a valuable strategic-planning tool.

To these ends, I endorsed the rather bold idea of investing in a systematic, university-wide cultural "audit." A steering committee of faculty, staff, and students, chaired by the dean of Kent State's Honors College, oversaw planning for the project, which was conducted by the firm Cultural Research, Inc. during Fall Semester 1997.

Information was gathered via two lengthy, open-ended questionnaires sent to all faculty and staff members; a series of focus groups with faculty, staff, and students; and follow-up telephone surveys.

All participation was voluntary and confidential. The result is a data-rich, eighteen-hundred page report that, not surprisingly, reveals multiple perceptions and many areas for improvement, as well as unique qualities and institutional strengths. The steering committee is now engaged in an ongoing process of analyzing and acting on findings by identifying Kent State-specific levers and barriers to change, with an initial emphasis on data that are most relevant to strategic planning. For example, the study shows that Kent State faculty and staff members share a remarkably strong commitment to the institution's educational and

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public-service missions and that faculty are eager for increased opportunities for innovation.

In addition to incorporating internally generated insights about campus culture into the next strategic plan, external perspectives will be systematically factored into the planning process via the Kent State University Centennial Commission, a broad-based corps of 160 volunteers from throughout the nation including business and civic leaders, alumni, and others with an interest in higher education. The Commission — named because members were asked to help define the kind of institution Kent State should be when it reaches its centennial in 2010 — spent six months exploring national trends and university efforts in five major areas: academic quality; student recruitment and retention; learning technologies; partnerships and collaborations; and values, identity, and communication.

The Centennial Commission initiative reflects an approach to partnerships with external constituencies that is genuinely reciprocal. Through this effort — which also involved scores of university faculty, staff, and students who provided information to and consulted with Commission members — several areas of tension between external demands and academic culture were put into perspective. For example, after studying the realities of student recruitment and retention, commissioners strongly supported a market-oriented, customer-service approach to recruitment and the delivery of student services. Yet, they did not suggest that faculty should relinquish control over curricular content or quality.

In the coming months, and throughout the course of the strategic-planning process, findings from the cultural self-study and the Centennial Commission initiative will be disseminated and discussed throughout the university community. By providing extensive, in-depth information about internal and external perspectives, both efforts will support the momentum for change that already has begun at Kent State. Specifically, the availability of well-documented institutional issues will help to create the sense of urgency that is a prerequisite for the creation of lasting change, and that is critical to combatting the complacency that prevents change from becoming anchored in the culture (Kotter 1996).

Lasting cultural change — the kind of change that is redefining scholarship and moving scholarly outreach from the service entrance to the front door of the academy — must be driven by a well-defined vision and leadership that invites innovation (Kotter 1996). Ultimately, each academic community must re-examine scholarship in the context of its own unique mission; determine the types and scope of scholarship that match its strengths; and experiment to find an optimum balance among multiple faculty responsibilities, institutional goals, and external expectations. As the Kent State University community is finding, these pursuits are strengthened by the availability of accurate and unvarnished information about both internal and external assumptions, perceptions, and expectations. ■

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## About the Author

Carol A. Cartwright (Ph.D., University of Pittsburgh) became the president of Kent State University in 1991 after serving as vice chancellor for academic affairs at the University of California at Davis, and dean for undergraduate programs and vice provost of The Pennsylvania State University. She was inducted into the Ohio Women's Hall of Fame in the first year she was eligible.

She served on the board of the American Council on Education and chaired the board of directors of the American Association for Higher Education. She chaired the Commission on Technology Transfer and Outreach of the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges and served on the NASULGC board. She serves on the Ohio Science and Technology Council, and chaired the Ohio Technology in Education Committee, which developed the state's master plan for technology in education from preschool through doctoral levels. In 1995, she joined the White House Advisory Council on Violence Against Women. As part of Kent State's commitment to regional development, she serves on the Akron Regional Development Board, the Western Reserve Economic Development Council, the Greater Cleveland Roundtable, the Cleveland Urban League, and is president of the Akron Roundtable Board of Trustees.