

## ***A Note From the Editor . . .***

It all started with Paula.

On a quiet, nondescript workday in April 2003, while looking the other way, I received an unexpected e-mail message from Dr. Paula Dressel, a member of the editorial board of the *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*. I had never met Paula personally, but I did know her to be a very conscientious member of the editorial board, and a tough critic of the articles I sent her! Paula was writing to inquire about devoting a special issue of the Journal to the topic of “Universities as Economic Engines, But With Attention to Communities Within.” At the time, unbeknownst to me, Paula was on leave from her faculty position at Georgia State University to the Annie E. Casey Foundation in Baltimore, Maryland. She had been working on the topic of universities as anchor institutions in their communities, and believed that this corollary subject was an important one, especially the dimension of it that related to the universities’ role as a good citizen in the community in which it resided. She wondered if this might be germane to the Journal’s readership. I decided to call a meeting of the editorial board as part of the 2003 Outreach Scholarship Conference in Madison, Wisconsin, in October 2003.

At this meeting, we decided that this was indeed an excellent idea, and the editor was given the green light to move forward with this project.

The first thing I decided was that it would be wise to bring in a guest editor, someone who was particularly knowledgeable and conversant on this topic. After a brief search I found Dr. David Maurrasse, and he graciously accepted this invitation. I knew David was the right choice for this, partly because of his excellent work in 2001 on *Beyond the Campus – How Colleges and Universities Form Partnerships with Their Communities*. On behalf of the editorial board and Journal readers generally, I want to thank David for this very generous contribution of his time and talents.

The idea of colleges and universities serving as economic anchors and engines in their states is not a new one. In a 1986 report entitled *The Higher Education-Economic Development Connection: Emerging Roles for Colleges and Universities in a Changing Economy*, prepared for the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, the Public Policy Center, SRI International, Menlo Park, California, said this:

...unless public colleges and universities develop for themselves appropriate and effective roles in economic development, many will find that state, community, and industry leaders will either begin to dictate potentially undesirable roles and restrictions for them or turn to other institutions to address their knowledge-related needs. (*p. ix*)

Many universities followed this advice and indeed began elevating the role of economic development in their strategic plans. In some cases this was in conjunction with the economic development initiatives of their governors and/or state legislatures, and in some cases it was the result of enlightened self-interest. In either event, the role of universities as vital components of state economic development plans was firmly planted and nourished.

What was not so widely acknowledged or accepted was the responsibility of colleges and universities to attend to the economic health and vitality of their own communities and neighborhoods. Often the good work that universities did “out in the state” was just that—out in the state. Efforts to reach out to adjacent communities were often spotty and serendipitous rather than intentional or strategic. This was the cause for dissonance among many on campus who sensed a betrayal of basic values and intent. It gave rise to initiatives that would enhance the value of the campus to the community in which it was located. Some of these initiatives are described in this special issue of the Journal.

On behalf of the editorial board I would like to extend a formal note of thanks to the Annie E. Casey Foundation for its support of this issue. In addition to allowing David to devote some of his time to this project, it has provided financial assistance in the editing and printing of this issue. We hope that the issue will contribute in a positive way to informing public and institutional policy concerning the responsibilities of civic engagement of colleges and universities and to encouraging additional contributions by higher education institutions to their own communities.

Comments and questions are encouraged.

Enjoy!

*Melvin B. Hill, Jr.*  
*Editor*