Applying a Change Model

As the nation confronts incredibly difficult social issues, universities are under a critical imperative to change in order to help find solutions. In this rapidly changing society, higher education finds itself fiercely competing for limited public dollars with other vital constituencies. At the same time, for-profit entrepreneurs are making inroads into many academic arenas. The health and well-being of universities require that land-grant institutions establish better links with urban universities and with the community. To accomplish this, extension and outreach must become the obligation of the total university, not just those who devote 100 percent of their time to it. If universities do not develop and maintain higher credibility through a greater presence in the external community, they will become a shadow of what they have been.

Discussion

Several forces are driving universities to change: the knowledge and information explosion, the high rate of technological development, advances in communication technologies, increasing diversity and globalization, greater competition for scarce resources, erosion of the public's trust in higher education, and demands by students and citizens for new and increased accountability.

The university is structurally divided internally and as a whole from the external community. These internal and external "disconnects," not the least of which is the disconnect between Cooperative Extension and the rest of the land-grant institutions, result in a lack of responsiveness and a lack of involvement in critical social concerns and political issues. Universities must create a more permeable structure, revitalize strategic planning initiatives, and use personnel changes at high administrative levels to drive change.

Sometimes, structural modification has been the starting point for institutional change; in other situations structure has been of little consequence, or structural changes have evolved as mission and vision have been redefined. Restructuring should lead to an institution becoming more adaptable and flexible, better able to meet the changing needs of society.

However, sometimes these structural changes have not been well thought out, requiring a process of review to go back and "change the changes." In some institutions the push for change has been faster than the workforce would like. The challenge for forceful leadership is to vividly explain the need for change so that others can understand and thus transform the norms of the institution. "The devil is in the details," said one panelist, indicating that implementation planning is an important part of the change process.

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In times of declining resources, faculty members must be more willing to accept change. According to Simon, people need to do "ands" not "ors" as part of this transformation. A member of the audience suggested that "universities can no longer be a large group of autonomous scholars. Individual goals must be balanced with collective institutional goals." While promotion and tenure are barriers prohibiting change, nonetheless, in the view of Wiley, "We need to stop beating on the issue of tenure and the issue of the reward system and get on with the work at hand."

Panelists described the various strategies their respective institutions have used to initiate and implement change. These change models differed in the details, but common to all were the following:

- a focus on mission, vision and strategic planning;

- the meaningful involvement of faculty and administrators at all levels;

- increased efforts to better integrate teaching, research, and outreach;

- the removal of internal departmental and collegiate boundaries;

- the development of strategies to streamline responsiveness to societal needs.

There seemed to be agreement that "we need to go beyond the rhetoric of change" and really do our work in unique ways — not just label things differently. "We must involve those we serve; we can't just tinker," said one panelist. Fundamental change is required. Another added, "We must poke and prod and look for indicators of change" in the university. "People need to know that we are really changing; people need to feel that it is the right thing to do," suggested a discussant.

Panelists stressed the importance of identifying successes and giving them enhanced visibility. "Short-term successes need to be demonstrated." Members of the community need to know that universities have research-based information that can contribute to the solution of societal problems, and that universities can produce "timely deliverables." Universities must demonstrate what they can do for the economy, the workplace, and communities.

If research universities are not able to change how they are perceived by the larger society, they may lose their ability to serve. While change — and the need for it — has always been with us, the pace of change is different, and universities must continuously assess their position in the community and in the marketplace in order to be adaptable and responsive. They must not lose sight of societal imperatives and must be responsive to community needs, not just driving change in society but in themselves as well.