

3-19-2014

President Theo Kalikow's University-Wide Presentation

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Recommended Citation

Kalikow, Theodora, "President Theo Kalikow's University-Wide Presentation" (2014). *Transition*. 2.
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**PRESIDENT THEO KALIKOW'S UNIVERSITY-WIDE PRESENTATION:
3/19/19**

Nancy Gish is right. This IS about democracy.

Public higher education was founded in this country on an underlying presupposition that education is a public good, one that should be supported to benefit society in the long term. The individuals who are educated to become teachers, lawyers, artists, philosophers, businesspeople, and engineers are all agents of social change and continuity, and the perpetuation of democracy. Yes, individuals benefit but public higher education is for the public good, and so deserving of public support.

But in the last 30 years or so public policy choices, political rhetoric, demographic and economic changes, and other structural factors have eroded this fundamental premise upon which public higher education has stood.

It is no longer effective to appeal to the old consensus because that old consensus has disappeared. The new presumption is that education is a private benefit that individuals should pay for themselves. And why not just measure educational success by tracking who gets a job and how much they get paid?

We need a new way to demonstrate the value of public higher education. A way that acknowledges (tacitly) the new realities that we are living in today and that makes it clear that society/taxpayers/businesses/etc., ALL benefit from public higher education.

More specifically, they benefit from our greatest resource: Our students who are taught and mentored by faculty and supported by staff.

I know that most, if not all of you, came to hear about more cost-cutting strategies. As I reported last Friday, those are coming in what's left of this month. This morning, I want to focus on a new way to demonstrate our value in the 21st century. I've been giving this issue a lot of thought and I am convinced that the way to bring this institution into focus for those upon whom we depend for support is to bring to life that vision of USM as Maine's Metropolitan University.

In today's world, the fundamental needs of our students certainly include a credential and a job, but they go way beyond that.

We know that the function of education is to awaken our students to the wider world of knowledge: the understanding of fields of inquiry and the construction of those fields over time; the dialogue with the past and into the future; the different modes of knowledge and inquiry; the ability to express and clarify one's own thoughts.

These are among the gifts of higher education, and they are also the broader skills that underpin the functioning of a healthy democracy.

But students need more. We ought to provide them some windows into the lives they could lead in the future, some chances to put theory into practice, with all that implies about the worlds in which that practice can take place -- the worlds of business, engineering, the arts, the worlds of other cultures, different social structures and different abilities and values.

Theory into practice. John Dewey was a proponent of it, and in the past 30 years or so there has been a huge explosion of academic interest. Service learning, study abroad, undergraduate research, internships, and so on, are now all well-developed communities of practice and scholarly research.

The concept and organizing principle of a Metropolitan University is a way to bring this work together into a vision that can guide our work and provide to the wider community a way to understand the work of the university, join in it, and support it through their tuition payments, taxes and private philanthropy.

This is NOT just a marketing and PR exercise. It is a fundamental way to re-focus.

As the Press Herald pointed out in Monday's editorial, we already are doing much of this work. But right now, this work is less than the sum of its parts.

Hundreds of businesses, schools, community service organizations and municipalities benefit from the contributions of our students and faculty.

I just received a note from Gordon Monk, CEO of a startup known as Cloud 9. Mr. Monk contacted Professor Wayne Cowart to determine if linguistics methods could be used to find critical errors in engineering documents that are the basis for development of new software and hardware systems.

Such errors, he told me, are widely recognized in the industry as sources of product defects. Wayne recruited several linguistics students to work with him and, guess what? Mr. Monk reports, and I quote, “The contribution of the USM Linguistics team has been of extraordinary value. There is no question we have substantially benefitted from their contribution. The students have also benefitted having now had over two years of startup experience in practical application of their education.” End quote.

This is a wonderful example, but we don’t organize ourselves to do this effectively and systematically. The community, as whole, does not value it even though sectors already are benefitting from our connections.

As I reported last week, implementing this vision of a metropolitan university is not simply status claimed, but one that is achieved. It is something that requires a certain amount of infrastructure, a structural foundation on which to build.

I’m pleased to report that the Chancellor has pledged \$500,000 of one-time seed money to help us initiate a process leading to tangible outcomes in terms of how to best organize ourselves.

Following further consultation with our campus, community, and system partners, before May graduation I will announce the establishment of a Metropolitan University Steering Committee made up of administrators, faculty, students, and members of our external community to establish concrete processes and outcomes for FY15.

This is a critically needed first step which will lead to work groups that can help us as we integrate the metropolitan university vision throughout our curriculum and undergraduate and graduate student experiences. This process also will allow us to collaborate on development of a set of clearly understood dashboard indicators as we monitor and evaluate progress.

The discussions we'll be having this spring with LAC also could lead to specific ideas on how to best replicate LAC'S success with interdisciplinary, community-based learning here in southern Maine.

Part of that aforementioned foundation will be made possible through a reallocation of resources, which will allow for the continued exploration of new, multidisciplinary programs. There is huge potential in such areas as entrepreneurship, cyber security, and design, the latter that would leverage the expertise of our folks in the arts and humanities.

We also must pursue development of adult degree completion programs in health and business, among other disciplines.

Changes in our existing curriculum also will help advance the vision of USM as Maine's Metropolitan University. Think of replacing our current array of small grad programs in the sciences with a Professional Science Master's complete with several clearly articulated tracks, or the enhancement of our various health and wellness programs.

These, among others, have the real potential for rich collaborative partnerships with the off-campus community.

I also don't want us to lose focus on our Title III work. This is an incredibly important initiative that can lead to the development of cross-curricular courses, learning communities and various high-impact fieldwork experiences known to improve student engagement and achievement. Title III also will help us institutionalize practices to improve retention and graduation rates.

In fact, we piloted a model of advising--tested in the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences--that works. This advising approach increased retention among participants by ten percent, and we're already at work implementing this in our other colleges.

All of this work demands a focus. We must get to a point where we can guarantee our students that they will have an opportunity for active, engaged learning with the community. And we have to promise our community that a process is in place,

which allows them to explore options for engagement with us around research, internships, and problem solving, and/or consulting.

By making our cost-cutting decisions within this framework and then focusing on realizing the vision of the metropolitan university, we can be sustainable and healthy. A reimaged USM can do its true job. But it's potentially much more.

Everyone should have access to learning where the academic fields are vital, the learning is engaging, and the scholarly community models the functioning of those communities that our students will enter.

Many of our students may be place-bound. Their means may be limited. But their minds don't have to be. Their life choices don't have to be. Our job is to get them out of the world of limited expectations to a wider world of possibility.

There will be time later for Q&A. I, and the Chancellor, will do our best to respond to any questions but for the purposes of today, I really want to hear your questions and feedback on our metropolitan university vision. It is, I believe, the framework that is really going to drive this university forward.