



The ENGAGED President: Changing Times, Unchanging Principles

by Myles Brand

Universities and colleges are dynamic institutions that undergo constant change. They change to accommodate the growth and new directions of human knowledge, of what is taught and how it is taught, and of what constitutes worthwhile research and creative activity. Universities also must change to meet the expectations and demands of their economic, cultural, and political environments. But we should not be disturbed by this Heraclitean image. The foundational values of American universities remain constant. In the words of former President Jimmy Carter, "Our challenge is to adapt to changing times while holding fast to unchanging principles."¹

It is the president's (or chancellor's) role to understand the need for innovation and lead the institution toward meeting the challenges of change, while simultaneously working to sustain the fundamental values of the academy. For both internal and external constituencies, the president must develop a sense of mission and cohesion that unites the institution and supports the will to make progress.

American university presidents are expected to be model citizens, public advocates for our democratic freedoms, and champions of worthy social causes. Some may argue that the presidents of the past viewed this obligation more seriously and were more active in the fight for social justice than we are today. I disagree. Fifty or more years ago, far fewer voices demanded public attention. Today, proliferating media outlets, shortened news cycles, and the increasing penchant for entertainment and public disagreement may make it appear that university and college presidents have become reticent. This is misleading. Higher education leaders continue to speak out on the day's critical issues, though it is more difficult to hear them over the media din.

MYLES BRAND is president of Indiana University.

The Presidency
Vol. 5, No. 3
FALL 2002 27

Let me offer a few current examples. Exploring the vast implications of genomics and its successor, proteomics, poses ethical dilemmas about privacy, safety, regulation, testing, and religious beliefs. While stem cell research promises dramatic advances in treating high-morbidity diseases, the harvesting of these cells from embryonic material runs up against strong religious beliefs concerning abortion and the sanctity of life. Harold Shapiro, who until recently was president of Princeton University, chaired the national commission on bioethics.

As president of the University of Michigan, Lee Bollinger added an important new dimension to the affirmative action debate by using sound social science research to demonstrate in two lawsuits that ethnic diversity enhances the learning environment for all students. On a related issue, Richard Atkinson, president of the University of California, argued convincingly that current standardized tests—the SAT I in particular—inhibit fairness in admissions. In each of these cases, today’s university presidents clearly engaged in public debate and intellectual leadership.

The engaged president also plays an important role in economic development. Indeed, universities have both a moral and a prudential obligation to do so. Land-grant universities were founded on the principle that development of the agricultural and the mechanical arts—that is, engineering—yields direct economic benefits for the state by both educating the workforce and supporting private sector initiatives. Technical universities, such as MIT and Cal Tech, have for some time developed intellectual property that has led to market opportunities. What’s new, however, is that many institutions are now responding to the demand—sometimes subtle, sometimes overt—to promote economic prosperity.

Economic Opportunities

Let me illustrate this point with reference to Indiana University (IU). As a public university, IU is disadvantaged by our state’s rust belt economy. A greater proportion of Indiana’s domestic product comes from basic manufacturing than that of any other state. But basic manufacturing tends to migrate to regions with low wages. This leads to plant closings, as jobs move south of the border or to Asia. Indeed, over the past decade, the average wage for Hoosier workers has decreased more rapidly than that of any other state and is now 90 percent of the national average. Clearly, Indiana must diversify its economy and develop industries that provide family wage jobs.

At my urging, Indiana University has undertaken a leadership role in restructuring the state’s economy. Our moral obligation may seem obvious, because IU is a public university and, as such, receives direct state support based on resident

student enrollment. But private or independent universities have similar obligations. As not-for-profit institutions, colleges and universities do not pay taxes on property or auxiliary enterprises that are necessary to carry out their mission. These forgone taxes create a reciprocal obligation for the institution, an obligation that requires the university to assist in enhancing the quality of life and economic prosperity of its local community, its state, and beyond.

No major public university can succeed for long at a greater level of achievement than its home state. Though exceptions exist, the most important variable in the success of a public institution is not the president, or even the governor. Rather, it is the state’s economy. When the state’s economy is healthy, funding for public universities tends to be good; when the state’s economy falters, as it presently is in most states, funding tends to diminish.

Understanding our obligations is only the beginning, however. Serious economic development depends on a tripartite partnership among higher education, the business community, and government. My task at IU is to build these external partnerships, while simultaneously supporting our traditional liberal arts emphasis. In other words, we must adapt to changing times, while holding firm to unchanging principles.

In some states, the business community and higher education have a history of successful collaboration. Indiana did not have that advantage. Some influential members of the business community had adopted the conservative, anti-academic rhetoric that characterized the cultural wars of the 1990s. This required me to spend considerable time in conversation with the state’s business leaders, maintain a regular output of op-ed pieces for the state’s newspapers, and speak about the importance of strong universities and their relationship to economic diversification. I argued that Indiana needed to develop a technology-focused economy for the 21st century. I pointed out the university’s essential role in producing educated workers for this new knowledge-based economy. I described university laboratories as environments that yield the discoveries and intellectual property necessary for business startup and advancement. Sounds easy, but it wasn’t. It required sustained and vigorous public advocacy.

IU’s ability to help jump-start a 21st century economy for Indiana grew by leaps and bounds when we received a major grant—\$105 million—from the Indianapolis-based Lilly Endowment—to conduct research on the human genome. This grant became the catalyst for a life and health sciences initiative in central Indiana that primarily involves the IU School of Medicine and several basic science departments on

the Bloomington campus. The grant also includes support for a Center on Bioethics, with a focus on issues surrounding genetic research. We also are in the planning and early implementation stages of an extensive research park adjacent to our Indianapolis campus.

The Central Indiana Health and Life Sciences Initiative has become the single most important economic development activity in the state. It has, quite appropriately, expanded beyond IU to include Purdue University, the state's other Association of American Universities member, as well as the Lilly Corporation (distinct from the philanthropic Lilly Endowment). The involvement of the City of Indianapolis and key local and state business organizations makes this a prime example of how three-way partnerships can contribute to economic transformation.

We have already seen early returns from these efforts. The medical school has reorganized itself around the Health and Life Sciences Initiative, attracting new faculty members, creating new research centers, and acquiring state-of-the-art instrumentation. Through a partnership with IBM, we obtained a teraflop supercomputer, which was, for at least two weeks, the fastest computer owned by a university. The state has supported a major new science building on IU's Bloomington campus, and the medical school in Indianapolis is in the process of adding several research buildings. We started a new college, the School of Informatics, which offers degrees in bioinformatics and medical informatics, among other areas. Undergraduate enrollment in the school has far exceeded expectations. And we are negotiating with the state's leadership for ongoing support of research in all fields, including the liberal arts. In meeting our moral obligations to the state by assisting with economic development, we also help ourselves advance our traditional missions.

During this process, I have worked to reassure the faculty that we are committed to both engaging in economic development to support the state and enhancing the arts and sciences. We are large and diverse enough to carry out both missions—to walk and chew gum at the same time, as it were. For example, to underscore my support of our humanities and arts programs, I started a major internal grant fund for faculty research and scholarship, which will quadruple the amount of grant funding received by these scholars and artists. All parts of the university have something to gain from engaging

In meeting our moral obligations to the state by assisting with economic development, we also help ourselves advance our traditional missions.

with the business community and contributing to the state's economic well-being.

Jumping the Hurdles

Those who are uncomfortable with higher education's involvement in economic development (and with a president's leadership to that end) do have legitimate concerns. Consider the potential conflict of interest issues. There is a temptation for universities to become directly involved in developing faculty intellectual property, sometimes to the extent that it impedes good judgment.

To avoid these situations, we must develop sound policies that enable us to assist those faculty members who actively seek partnerships with business and government. Many scholar-researchers in the sciences, business, medicine, and other disciplines welcome the opportunity to license their intellectual property. In some cases, they start new companies or hold equity positions in companies that emerge as a result of their discoveries. These same faculty members expect the university to assist them with patenting and licensing their discoveries and, in some cases, to provide expert business advice and capital for business startups. In fact, as we recruit new scientists, I am finding that more and more of them are interested in the university's royalty policies and the strength of our technology transfer operations.

Another type of conflict of interest involves graduate students. Suppose that students are working in the laboratory of a faculty member who is engaged in a business that both utilizes his research and employs these same graduate students. This raises questions about student involvement in research that cannot be disclosed.

We can answer these questions, but only after we explicitly address them. It is incumbent upon the university to implement policies that balance students' rights and responsibilities with faculty members' freedom to engage in entrepreneurial activities. It also is incumbent on the university to develop policies



*Ann Hayes Die, Ph.D. President, Hendrix College
Oil on Canvas*



The Portrait Source
Flat Rock, NC

We are proud to have worked with the finest universities and colleges in the nation. Let us help you find an artist to honor your leaders, founders and donors.

For portfolios - 1 (800) 586-6575
www.ThePortraitSource.com



*James M. Stuart President Emeritus, Hofstra University
Oil on Canvas*

that balance the protection of its nonprofit status and its expectation of a fair return on its support of faculty members with their rights to commercialize their own intellectual property.

As presidents lead their institutions into closer collaboration with the private sector, and as faculty members take greater advantage of opportunities to engage with private industry, universities will need to be thoughtful about the development of fair policies. National associations are providing guidance and making available reports of best practices. Consultation with faculty leadership and advisory councils is essential, as is the willingness to remain flexible about the policies adopted. Until equilibrium is reached, continued attention to developing good policies is vital.

The engaged president, of course, seeks community, state, and national involvement on matters of economic development and beyond. The opportunities are myriad, from dealing with the consequences of September 11 (such as enhanced emphasis on internationalization, computer and biohazard security, and foreign language instruction) to involvement in societal issues (such as race relations, literacy, homelessness, health care for the indigent, and K-12 education). Indeed, each area is of critical importance to the publics we serve, even if it may not be central to the traditional academic mission of the university. The engaged president will address these issues, not only through a personal commitment of time and energy, but also by enlisting the efforts of the campus community. But presidents must always balance these efforts at good works with the central goals of the institution. The engaged president is one who believes that finding balance results in genuine improvement in the lives of those both inside and outside the academy.

As Bertrand Russell pointed out, "Change is one thing, progress is another. Change is scientific. Progress is ethical. Change is indubitable, whereas progress is a matter of controversy."² We can make progress, in Russell's sense, only if we develop a sense of mission and cohesion that unites the university's various constituents and expresses the core values of the academy. It is these core values that will sustain us in the midst of the controversies that accompany change. And we must develop policies and partnerships that nurture progress. These are both moral and prudential obligations for higher learning. ■

Notes

1. President Jimmy Carter inaugural address. January 20, 1977.
2. Russell, Bertrand. *Unpopular Essays*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1950.