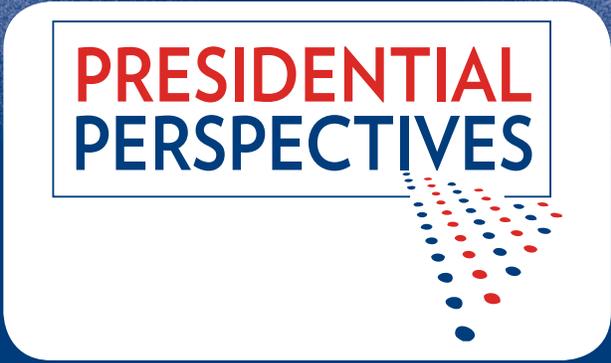


PRESIDENTIAL PERSPECTIVES



A HIGHER EDUCATION
PRESIDENTIAL THOUGHT
LEADERSHIP SERIES

2013-2014 Series:

Elevating Sustainability Through Academic Leadership

CHAPTER

4

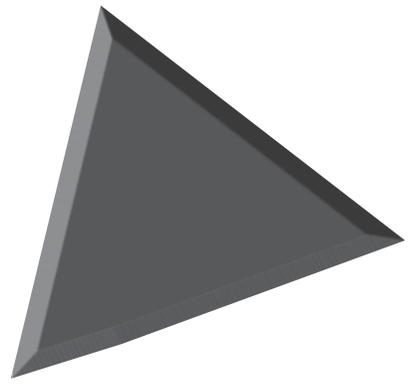
**Elevating Sustainability
Integrating Sustainability:**

*Universities and the Urban
Environment*

aramark 

Elevating Sustainability Integrating Sustainability:

Universities and the Urban Environment



Dr. Wim Wiewel: President of Portland State University

With half the world's population of 7 billion now living in urban or rapidly urbanizing areas, any path to sustainability will have to negotiate the complexities and contradictions that define the modern city. Industry and consumption—engines of the economy—produce a lion's share of pollutants and climate-altering carbon emissions. Wealth and poverty coexist in stark contrast. Culture thrives. Ideas emerge and are co-opted, re-engineered, and implemented. Resilient yet damaging, cities hold the keys to an uncertain future.

We see awareness and urgency on the rise in American cities, with mayors emerging as the most effective leaders and advocates for stemming the slow-motion calamity of climate change. With constrained budgets, however, these municipalities are limited in their ability to impose bold actions. They must instead seek out other partners similarly invested in the long-term well-being of their community.

Urban Universities as the New Anchor Institutions

This search for strong civic partners parallels a shifting power dynamic within these cities. Information sources have moved from local daily papers and television newscasts to a place-ambivalent Internet. Industrial production continues to migrate away from central business districts to suburbs or offshore. Corporate headquarters have consolidated to a few major business capitals. Shopping has transitioned from local stores to malls, chains, big boxes, and, finally, online purveyors.

“ *This is the opportunity of the 21st century for our urban universities: to employ their missions of education and service in solving these challenges while creating equitable economic opportunities for city denizens.* **”**





PRESIDENTIAL PERSPECTIVES

The disappearance of traditional community anchors has left a void in our cities, which are otherwise well-positioned to address global sustainability dilemmas. This is the opportunity of the 21st century for our urban universities: to employ their missions of education and service in solving these challenges while creating equitable economic opportunities for city denizens.

These universities tend to be located in the urban core, closely connected to government agencies, local businesses, and nonprofits, and have missions that embrace community engagement, equal access, and applied research. They differ from the better-recognized flagships and land grants, most of which were formed more than a century ago, by their youth, focus on accessibility, smaller endowments, and tighter connection to the opportunities and challenges cities provide to society.

The Coalition of Urban Serving Universities (USU), with more than 40 members nationwide, shares urban-focused missions and advocacy around key initiatives such as cradle-to-career education efforts, workforce preparedness, and community health.

Applied to sustainability, these schools can play a lead role in the promotion of energy efficiency, neighborhood-scale green infrastructure, local activism, regional food sheds, equity, and entrepreneurship. Each of these efforts implements economic, social, and environmental aspects of sustainability. Many begin on campus and surrounding neighborhoods before expanding to the broader region. And those that are successful adapt their efforts to the local setting, history, and culture.

Chicago and the Great Cities Effort

The University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) is a USU member that has oriented its research and community engagement efforts toward improving the health and well-being of its Chicagoland neighbors.

The nexus for many of these efforts is the Great Cities Institute (which I was involved with in the 1990s), itself in some ways a response to UIC's own history: in the 1960s, then-Mayor Richard Daley unilaterally decided to move the campus into established Near West Side neighborhoods, displacing residents and businesses while showcasing tension between urban renewal and social equity.

Through the Great Cities Institute (established 1993) and related efforts, UIC has established deep and meaningful collaborations with its surrounding neighborhoods. This includes successful initiatives around health disparities and nutrition that connect UIC's medical school and public health programs to residents in more than 40 Chicago-area communities.

Arizona State University and Water in the Desert

When in the desert, study water. That's the case at Arizona State University, a USU member located in arid Phoenix, which receives a scant eight inches of rain annually. ASU is home to "Decision Center for a Desert City," a multidisciplinary initiative bringing together research around climate, water, and decision-making, while bridging the gap between science and policy.

This massive National Science Foundation initiative, established in 2004, has produced an impressive amount of research and modeling tools, connected regional water managers with decision makers, and built partnerships with other cities (including an NOAA-funded partnership with Portland and PSU) that link the Phoenix work to similar urban climate adaptation initiatives. The program, administered by ASU's Global Institute of Sustainability, also includes extensive outreach efforts to community and K-12 schools.



PRESIDENTIAL PERSPECTIVES

Committing to the Portland Climate

Portland State University, with our motto “Let Knowledge Serve the City,” fits the mold of these urban-serving institutions. Established in 1946 as an extension center for returning World War II veterans, the college grew with the city, aligning programs to the needs of the Portland region— a well-regarded school of urban studies and planning, one of the nation’s first doctoral programs in environmental science, and professional programs in education and social work.

I’ve had the honor of serving on the steering committee of the American College and University Presidents’ Climate Commitment (ACUPCC) a nonprofit organization that assists universities in identifying and achieving greenhouse gas emission reductions; educating the public about the threat of climate change; and developing plans to adapt to the climate disruption now underway.

As one of more than 650 ACUPCC signatories, PSU has committed to reaching net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2040. Our climate action plan was modeled after a joint plan released in 2009 by the city of Portland and the surrounding Multnomah County.

That regional context matters. Oregon revealed a strong conservation streak in the 1960s and ’70s, passing legislation that required bottle deposits, bike and pedestrian infrastructure investments, and protection of our beaches from private development. The Portland metropolitan area established the nation’s first regional government that would enact and oversee an urban growth boundary to protect natural areas and contain sprawl. Those limits on growth fostered the success of a mass transit system that today includes buses, light rail, commuter rail and streetcar.

So when PSU identifies transportation as a major carbon contributor, we have a strong foundation upon which we can craft solutions. We encourage faculty, staff, and students to commute to campus via light rail, bike, or bus. We’ve set up partnerships with on-demand car-sharing services renting by the minute or hour. And when we develop real estate in Portland’s downtown, we build academic and research space, mixed-use housing, and retail—but not parking lots.

Partnerships with nongovernmental organizations such as ACUPCC have been invaluable to furthering sustainability on our campus. A couple of other NGOs that universities may wish to connect with for assistance and guidance on best practices: the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education, which provides resources and professional development for campus sustainability coordinators; and the Center for Green Schools, a project of the U.S. Green Building Council that promotes the greening of education facilities from kindergarten through college.

Buying in to Sustainability

In 2008, trustees of the James F. and Marion L. Miller Foundation decided to make a long-term catalytic education investment in the Portland region. They saw Portland State as a natural partner because of our mission of community engagement. We saw this as our opportunity to accelerate and amplify our sustainability efforts, which were then underway for nearly a decade.

That summer, the Miller Foundation made a 10-year, \$25 million investment in PSU—the largest in our school’s history. Through this investment, we’ve developed University-wide infrastructure for sustainability activities that enhance the student experience, expand faculty excellence, and strengthen community engagement. Our specific areas of focus refer back to our location and position in Portland and Oregon: urban sustainability, ecosystem services, and social determinants of health.



PRESIDENTIAL PERSPECTIVES

Sustainability in the Neighborhood

PSU's 49-acre campus is home to eight LEED-certified buildings. With Oregon Health & Science University and Oregon State University, we're building the Collaborative Life Sciences Building. When it opens in fall 2014, this will be the largest academic building in Oregon—and LEED Platinum.

Portland's EcoDistricts initiative extends sustainability to the neighborhood, integrating buildings and infrastructure with people and action. An EcoDistrict team assists property owners with planning and technical assistance to improve energy efficiency, and to identify common concerns and goals. PSU commits students and faculty expertise to the project. The "South of Market" (SoMa) EcoDistrict overlaps our campus and includes 92 acres of mixed commercial, residential, academic, and green space. In SoMa, one of team's first priorities is the restoration of a series of urban parks designed in the 1960s by influential landscape architect Lawrence Halprin that have since fallen in disrepair.

Sharing the Portland Success Story

While we certainly can't take all the credit for Portland's sustainability reputation, PSU can help share the story. One way we're doing that is via First Stop Portland. Started with a seed grant and community support, First Stop serves as the "welcome wagon" for national and international delegations traveling to Portland to learn more about the region's approaches to sustainability. We connect them with business, government, and academic professionals who lead them on customized tours, focused on topics such as green building, multi-modal transit, and sustainable food systems. Since its inception in 2009, First Stop has hosted dozens of visiting groups from as far as Australia and Uzbekistan.

In spring 2013 we launched the **Urban Sustainability Accelerator**, a yearlong program through which we assemble a team of expert advisers to help other mid-sized cities implement their own sustainable solutions. The first accelerator cohort includes representatives from Louisville, Kentucky; El Paso and Waco, Texas; Sacramento, California; Wichita, Kansas; and even the original Portland in Maine.

Accountability and a note of caution

Naturally, if you're going to talk the talk, you'd better walk the walk when it comes to sustainability. Because when you don't, you hear about it.

In spring 2013, PSU hosted noted author and speaker Tim Wise, who spoke to a capacity crowd of nearly 2,000 students, faculty, staff and community members on issues related to racism and privilege. The event was by all accounts a huge success.

A few days later, however, I received an irate letter from a recent alumna. As a student, she had been a leader in the "Take Back the Tap" movement, which spawned installation of bottle-filling stations and PSU's Sustainable Drinking Water Task Force, working to increase the availability of clean and free water while decreasing consumption of bottled water.

But on the podium during Wise's talk: a plastic bottle of water...

Communities have long memories—particularly those who've been slighted in the past. They will hold you to your promises, with little regard to institutional budget challenges or competing priorities. That makes it critical to align sustainability efforts closely with regional values, using models that work, and forming strong external partnerships.

PRESIDENTIAL PERSPECTIVES

Sustainability for all

For a young, urban research university like Portland State, sustainability has allowed us new ways of defining our work, creating new partnerships, and building stronger synergies across disciplines. It has improved perceptions about our engaged approach to education, helped raise private money, and attracted vital research dollars. And by integrating sustainability throughout our curriculum, we can give students from the humanities to engineering the set of tools they'll need to bring a sustainable mindset to life after college.

For our fellow urban-serving institutions, long overlooked as “the university next door,” sustainability has helped to harness their intellectual firepower and growing research capacities in addressing local versions of the global problems conjured by climate change, poverty and policy.

Will sustainability eventually be all that we do? I hope not. My goal is that it will one day be part of *everything* we do—as a means to creating a better, brighter future for our cities and beyond.

The author wishes to note that Jonathan Fink, vice president for research and strategic partnerships at Portland State University, contributed to this article.



Dr. Wim Wiewel assumed the presidency of Portland State University in August 2008. Prior to coming to PSU, Wiewel was the provost and senior vice president of Academic Affairs at the University of Baltimore. From 1979–04, Wiewel was with the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC), where he most recently served as dean of the College of Business Administration. Wiewel also directed UIC's Center for Urban Economic Development. He holds degrees in sociology and urban planning from the University of Amsterdam in the Netherlands, and a Ph.D. in Sociology from Northwestern University.

Wiewel is chair of the Coalition of Urban Serving Universities and on the boards of the Portland Business Alliance, World Affairs Council of Oregon, the American College and University Presidents' Climate Commitment, and the Metro Leadership Council. He is past president of the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning, a fellow of the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, and senior editorial adviser of *Economic Development Quarterly*.