The Vision within the Vision: 
Reframing FIU’s Approach to the Community

Mark B. Rosenberg
Provost & Professor of Political Science
September 29, 2005

Draft: Comments from the Faculty Senate and other members of the University community are welcomed!

Throughout the United States, there is a robust debate about the multiple roles and responsibilities of public universities. Nearly six years ago, the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities called upon institutions of higher education to become engaged in partnerships with their respective communities. This call coincided with a movement among many reorienting themselves toward their respective communities. Many institutions saw in their local communities opportunities to give back as well as to reinvigorate and strengthen their academic mission.

This perspective has ripened alongside a backdrop of rapid changes in state funding and support for public higher education. From the highpoint of the dot-com and Y2K frenzy of the last years of the 20th century to the unfortunate decline of public funding for higher education following 911, there has been an effort to link public institutions to the broader economic and social development needs of their constituent communities.

Many major urban public institutions have been especially successful recently in developing and refining both the logic and terms of community engagement. A number of successful initiatives include:

♦ Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond Virginia has taken a leading role in revitalizing the downtown area through the creation of a health sciences center and a related biomedical incubator.
♦ Arizona State University has linked its regional campus system to the broader economic development challenges of metropolitan Phoenix-Tempe; and
♦ The University of Cincinnati has explicitly embraced its urban setting to provide practical experience for its undergraduate students.

Pushing the Boundaries of Engagement: Universities are Reliable Anchors in a Community

The work of CEOs for Cities, a network of mayors, corporate executives, university presidents, business and civic leaders has creatively pushed the boundaries of engagement in cities noting that better than 50% of the country’s colleges and universities are located in central cities and their immediate surroundings. These institutions are
largely “enduring components of urban economies” unlike private sector companies that may come and go as a consequence of mergers and acquisitions. The futures of urban colleges and universities are tied to the health of their communities. These universities continue to be among the most valuable assets in cities advancing the critical educational, health, and social service needs of urban residents on one hand while spurring economic revitalization initiatives on the other hand. Urban universities have come to play significant roles in the urban economic growth and revitalization.

CEOs for Cities presents a strategic framework identifying six areas where colleges and universities meaningfully impact jobs and economic growth in disadvantaged areas (see the graphic below). They are: purchasing of goods and services, employment generation, developing real estate, creating business incubators, advising business and building networks, and workforce development.

Dr. Richard Freeland, Northeastern University’s president, has thoughtfully identified three paradigms for the academy’s historical relationship to and impact on its
surrounding community. “Incidental impacts” occur naturally because of what universities do as academic institutions—providing jobs, spending money, attracting external research dollars, impacting the cultural life of a community, improving its health care. Intentional contributions comprise those that occur because a university sets out to strengthen or support the community in a specific way. Examples include a research center focusing on the metropolitan region, or a partnership with city schools to improve math and science skills among students, or specific recruiting strategies focused on underserved groups. A third impact focuses on “extracted benefits.” Such a relationship occurs because a city has demanded them in exchange for something the university is seeking.

Freeland suggests that many communities view their universities as burdens and therefore as appropriate targets for extracted benefits. He bases his generalizations on Boston, where town-gown relations are often a function of creeping neighborhood land acquisitions by a host of growing universities. His approach is to call for a new perspective on university-city relations, suggesting that “the well-being of universities is inextricably linked to the well-being of surrounding communities.” As a consequence, a university located in a major metropolitan area cannot be indifferent to the health of its community. For Freeland, one important an emergent trend is for universities to focus much more on intentional impacts to neighborhood, community and regional well-being. This is all the more important given the volatility of the private sector and the short-lived presence of leading businesses in a given community. Thus, urban universities are now becoming “the reliable anchors on which the community needs to depend not only for jobs and expenditures but also for corporate citizenship much more broadly.” Freeland calls for a double paradigm shift: universities must shift toward actively working with community leaders for mutual benefit while community leaders must move toward seeing universities as critical engines of development in a knowledge based economy.2

A narrower focus on the roles of universities in urban areas focuses on land development. In The University as Urban Developer, David C. Perry and Wim Wiewel suggest that university based-land development is clearly a significant element of urban formation. Thus, the fundamental intellectual mission of the university cannot be understood outside its context and that universities are among the largest landowners and employers in cities, as well as major consumers of private goods and public services. It is logical therefore for a university to have a host of external constituents and for it to reflect both the institutional demands of the academy that it directly serves and the city (or cities) in which it is located.3

In its three decades of existence, FIU has given little sustained thought to the complex of university-community relationships that characterize its existence until President Maidique initiated the Millennium Strategic Planning Process in 2000-2001. The themes were identified in academic programs, research, and service that offered opportunities for development, the potential to achieve strategic advantages in higher education, and
that necessarily involved engagement at both the local and global level. Each of the six—
international, environment, Florida and local economic development, health, arts culture
and diversity, and learning opportunities (see italicized portions in the Appendix that
highlight university community connections) identified community connections that
could enhance the activity as well as be enhanced by it.

FIU Position Papers Developed

Two cross functional position papers emerged from the strategic planning process that
echo the concerns raised by CEOs for Cities, Dr. Freeland, and Perry and Wiewel. 4
“Economic Development Agenda for Florida International University” was targeted to
the “development of an infrastructure for education and industry partnership at FIU that
will substantially enhance the State of Florida efforts to maximize its potential to compete
in the New Economy.” It points to the Southern Growth Policies Board essay, Innovation
U: New University Roles in a Knowledge Economy and identifies 12 universities that
play significant roles in stimulating their regions’ economic development. It proposes
new academic programs (medicine and entrepreneurship among others), industry
partnerships (an incubator, an office of technology transfer, and focused research) and
calls for a media strategy that highlights FIU’s contributions to Florida’s economic
development.

A second paper, “Local and Global Engagement Recommendations,” points to
engagement as one of the central dimensions of American higher education in the 21st
century. It argues that FIU’s engagement mission must address the “salient economic,
urban, environmental, and technological problems confronting a rapidly growing
transnational community with some of the most complex political, economic, and social
welfare issues facing any major American city. These include huge disparities in income
and pervasive conditions of ethnic and racial isolation and polarization; public
corruption; the need to build viable public and private communities of interest crossing
socio-economic and racial/ethnic/cultural/linguistic divides; public sector
responsiveness; and issues of economic and technological growth development.”5 The
paper offers three recommendations: 1) the University leadership should incorporate
engagement as a primary goal of FIU’s mission as an engaged top urban public research
university, 2) it should complete an internal audit of all university engagement activities
for all schools and colleges, and 3) it should explore ways to incorporate engagement
activities in the reward structure of the university in faculty and staff assignments,
evaluation of teaching, research and service activities.

In the three years that have passed since these position papers and others calling for
expanded engagement were written, FIU has made significant progress in further
engaging our community. Both its president and provost have been engaged in
community leadership: the president took a leadership role in bringing to the
community its school superintendent and the provost led a strategic planning initiative
to reorganize the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce. Beyond these specific actions, the progress tracks well against the strategic framework for leveraging College and University assets developed by CEOs for Cities: the institution has a significant profile in operating impact as both a purchaser and employer. We have a significant impact in learning through our workforce preparation (pre-collegiate, collegiate and post baccalaureate) and as an advisor/network builder through the multiple engagements of our faculty with community organizations. We have given less thought to our role as investor, only now starting to engage in incubation services. The institution has not really conceptualized its role as a real estate developer.

Yet, even with the explicit call for engagement coming through the Millennium Plan and even with the deep connections that can be found between most academic units and community constituents, the metaphorical whole is not greater than the sum of its parts. We can more aggressively wrap our arms around our community and buy into the need to enhance community well being. We can more aggressively link our institution to our context. We can be more aggressive in putting our students to work to improve our community. We can more self-consciously link our research to community well-being, and we can be more thoughtful and strategic in forging community partnerships that can lift the entire community and the university. Win-win partnerships with community groups are critical to university and community well being.

There is some urgency to a more aggressive approach. First, it is clear that the University has excellent community partnerships in place, particularly with the Miami Dade County Public Schools. These partnerships are so successful that they nearly led to a crisis this past summer in classroom availability: nearly 33% of all classrooms this summer were allocated to pre-collegiate programs with a high school partner or counterpart that focused on science, math and/or engineering. ENLACE, TRIO, Gear-Up, Proyecto ACCESS, and Upward Bound are just a few of the initiatives that brought nearly 2000 junior high and high school students to both campuses last summer. These initiatives are just a few of the grass-roots partnerships that have already been established between our institution and community agencies. The fact that we were surprised by the on-campus impact last summer is vivid testimony to the absence of a clear and focused community strategy.

Second, as we edge closer to the establishment of a medical school, we must recognize that this initiative and its subsequent developments (medical education, expanded clinical experience for our students, the initiation of 24/7 linkages to community clinics and hospitals, clinical research that is cutting edge in life support and saving, expanded initiatives to reduce community health disparities) will immerse our institution as never before into the community.

Third, for three decades we have been able to focus on our two campus development plan with little sustained thought about our neighbors or indeed expansion beyond those
already established perimeters. There have been exceptions: moving the southern boundary of University Park back and forth to partner with the Dade County Youth Fair; the purchase of the Cordis site and establishment of the Engineering and Computing Center at Flagler and 107 Avenue; the acquisition of the Wolfsonian museum and research institute on South Beach; the opening of the Pines Center in Broward County in response to community need and interest there; the creation of downtown centers for research (College of Health and Urban Affairs) and training (The Chapman Graduate School of Business); and the development of an education center in Tianjin China for the School of Hospitality Management. What each of these initiatives holds in common is the convergence of opportunity with a good business deal. When necessary, each of these initiatives could be rationalized within the context of the broader institutional strategy, if only as an after the fact exercise. Each initiative could be rationalized as well within the context of the institution’s strategy.

Now, there are forces far and near that suggest we need to develop a more aggressive vision for our university within the vision as a top urban public research university. What are these forces? First, we know that there will continue to be rapid expansion of the State University System as a consequence of Florida’s demographics. How should FIU respond to this opportunity? Should we continue to expand our enrollment? If so, where and how? Which model might we follow: using joint use facilities with community colleges to absorb growth, expanding our two campus complex or opening other sites—such as in Wellington, Downtown Miami and or Homestead? Our state legislature and the Board of Governors will have expectations about our growth and we must have a response that is credible and affordable.

Second, closer to home, we should recognize that there are some important community opportunities that we need to address even if only to improve our own well-being. Three immediately present themselves. The Downtown area is rapidly transforming and is becoming a residential destination. As the transformation of city-center takes place, the FIU presence needs to be enhanced to provide educational services as well as enhanced capabilities to engage and guide the community. Urban in-fill is now a reality. If FIU does not establish a presence that is commensurate with its role in the community in this key area of our community, another university will. The competitive marketplace for higher education services in a knowledge based economy virtually guarantees this. Critical ingredients that we need to provide: a rationale, a strategy, a program and funding.

Another community opportunity lies right at the edge of both University Park and Biscayne Bay. Both neighboring municipalities are discovering that the University is an asset and that this asset can help to improve community and neighborhood well-being. The elected leadership of Sweetwater has ambitious plans for community enhancement that include closer working relations with FIU. The mayor has said that he wants their community to “look like FIU.” How can Sweetwater be more intimately linked to FIU
through commercial, residential and service oriented enterprises? This will only happen if FIU and Sweetwater explicitly join in partnership as a means to coordinate and improve land use on all related sites.

Similar challenges are presented by the City of North Miami. That community has recently embraced an invigorated redevelopment initiative, keyed in part by the revenue that will be generated by Biscayne Landing, the ambitious condominium development at the Biscayne Bay Campus’ front door. While the City has come to FIU with requests to improve community wellbeing (with the creation of a bicycle path through the campus), there have been few serious FIU generated initiatives asking for cooperation from that burgeoning municipality. Yet who would deny that improvement in community standard of living there will enhance the prospects for the Biscayne Bay Campus?

Where do we go from here? Clearly, we need to reconceptualize our community vision. We need to be comfortable with the development of partnerships with specific municipalities that can result in win-win relationships around mutual interests. We should be celebrating those extant community partnerships that give testimony to the impact that we have in our community while at the same time summoning other opportunities that can enhance community well-being. We can be more explicit about the implications for our community of the research that we are carrying out. And we can certainly take greater pride in our community connectivity. Our distinctiveness as an institution of higher education is as much about our community as it is about us. Together we can make a formidable statement about the modern urban public university!
Strategic themes are areas of activity (academic programs, research, and service) that offer opportunities for development and the potential to achieve strategic advantages in higher education. Given rapid globalization in the 21st century, FIU’s strategic themes necessarily involve engagement at both the local and global level.

A. International

Florida International University was originally chartered with a mission to promote international understanding. We responded to this mission by appointing faculty who have professional expertise in fields that are international in content and application and who have professional experience abroad as well as by encouraging our students to pursue a bilingual/bilingual competency and study abroad experience. These efforts led to a distinguished international reputation, particularly in international business and the study of the Latin American and Caribbean region.

Our efforts in the international sphere are supported by our geographic location; the cultural and ethnic diversity of the South Florida community; the continued globalization of the Florida and national economies; and the State’s desire to be a global leader in economic development in the 21st Century. These conditions provide a unique opportunity for FIU to be a major connecting point between nations and their citizens.

B. Environment

South Florida is a fragile blend of the ocean, Everglades, and urban areas. Continued development of the area provides a unique opportunity for environmental education and research. Understanding our natural and man-made environments and the relationships between them is necessary for the continued vitality of both. Population growth and exploitation of natural resources and the environment have created local and global environmental problems that must be addressed to ensure a sustainable environment and development.

Environmental knowledge relies on the humanities to help clarify our values and attitudes toward our environment, the basic and applied sciences which teach us how environmental processes work and how we can influence these processes, and planning and management disciplines to develop and implement effective and efficient improvement efforts. Applying our understanding of the dynamics of these systems can provide models that will assist in addressing both local and global environmental issues.

C. Florida and Local Economic Development

FIU’s future is strongly tied to the economic health and development of the state of Florida and the South Florida community. The opportunity to partner with the local community to provide the research and innovation required to address social and economic problems and to enhance economic development is critical to the University’s future.

Our greatest contribution to economic development is our graduates, who constitute a major portion of the region’s educated workforce. However, the University’s role in economic development extends beyond the local community to include the global community. The State of Florida has a vision of “being a global leader in knowledge-based jobs, leading-edge technology, and competitive enterprises in traditional and new businesses” (Partnering to Shape Florida’s Economic Future: 2001-2006). FIU has a major determining role to play in helping the state achieve this vision and enhancing the economy of the local community by providing expertise...
in management, law, economics, commerce, science, and especially in new technologies, such as information and biomedical technologies, which are critical to South Florida.

D. **Health**

Primary care, prevention of disease, rehabilitation, public health, and environmental health are concerns of every community. FIU has established a role as a provider of health professionals – nurses, physical therapists, biologists – and researchers dedicated to addressing the health needs of the local community. In recognition of the increasing multidisciplinary nature of health care, FIU encourages multidisciplinary instructional and research activities, including the creation of a Center for Biomedical Engineering. The University intends to continue its engagement with the health care needs of the community and to expand its engagement as the needs of the community grow and evolve. Our involvement in these efforts will help meet the needs of the local community and provide us with the experience needed to develop health care services and techniques that have application beyond the local community.

E. **Arts, Culture, and Diversity**

South Florida and FIU have diverse populations that create opportunities to understand and appreciate different artistic and cultural traditions and modes of artistic expression, recognize the interplay of culture and artistic expression, and celebrate diversity. FIU’s two museums, the Art Museum and The Wolfsonian-FIU, and outstanding programs in Music, Art, Theatre, Dance, and Film offer students unique academic and professional experiences. These facilities and programs enrich campus life, enhance community involvement, and support our quest for excellence. FIU will continue its leadership in these areas and in providing learning opportunities to meet the needs of diverse populations.

F. **Learning Opportunities**

Formal education is and will continue to be a major element of FIU’s engagement with its constituent communities, particularly the South Florida community. Graduates are encouraged to pursue a bilingual/biliterate competency and to experience study abroad programs. However, opportunities for the future lie beyond the traditional undergraduate and graduate education models. Changes in the economy and career patterns will result in situations in which individuals will have to renew/develop career skills. This shift will create a need for new or additional programs in adult learning, continuing professional education, and technology-based education as well as self-improvement programs. Meeting these needs will require the increased use of distance learning technology as a means of enhancing access to educational opportunities. Moreover, the need for traditional students to become better integrated into their communities will increase the demand for experiential and service-learning programs.
Endnotes

2 See Richard Freeland, “Prepared Remarks to the Boston Foundation Board of Directors,” February 8, 2005, pp. 4-8; Also see his “Universities and Cities Need to Rethink their Relationships,” Chronicle of Higher Education, May 13, 2005.
4 See http://www.fiu.edu/~pie/crossfcn.htm.