

2-16-2022

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Recommended Citation

Nightingale, Kimberly and Seltzer, Ethan, "Portland, Portland State, and the Urban University Idea" (2022).
Historical Articles and Essays. 6.
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Portland, Portland State, and the Urban University Idea

Kimberly Nightingale and Ethan Seltzer

February 16, 2022

Introduction

This year we'll celebrate the 50th anniversary of the City of Portland's 1972 Downtown Plan, one of the most consequential plans in the City's history. That plan put in place a vision for a public, pedestrian-scaled, multipurpose, and vital downtown, a downtown able to contribute profoundly to the well-being of the entire City and the region. Through the requirements adopted in the Downtown Plan, and subsequent public and private investments stemming from it, Portland's core area became an international icon for central city recovery.

In addition to reshaping and redirecting the physical development of downtown, that plan also formally identified Portland State University as Portland's "urban university." How did this mission statement for PSU end up in a Portland City plan? What did the term mean to the City and to PSU, and what might it mean today and in the future? As we celebrate the 50th anniversary for the 1972 Downtown Plan, how should that celebration enable us to better understand PSU's role in the City and the region, past, present, and future?

This paper begins with an examination of the history of the urban university idea in the United States, followed by the presentation of a working definition for what an urban university is today. It then examines the way that being an urban university has been baked into PSU's identity from its very beginning, and ends with some thoughts about where we might go from here.

1) The Urban University Idea in the United States

Before the advent of the Morrill Act of 1862, US universities were located primarily in the East and reflected a classical view of knowledge and education. In particular, they reflected the notion that the life of the mind was a cloistered one, existing at some remove from the tumult of everyday life, often behind high walls, and focused on an elite view of knowledge, learning, and what mattered. Cities were not considered ideal places for universities. Detached, pastoral settings were considered preferred environments for learning and teaching (Severino, 1996; Spaights, 1980).

Thanks to the Morrill Land Grant College Act of 1862, new states were given grants of land that they could use to raise the funds needed to establish state colleges and universities. The higher education objectives of the act were to create the capacity for research and service related to the agricultural and mechanical industrial sectors of state economies and, most importantly, to bring higher education closer to people who weren't able to relocate and live apart from their families and communities.

Land grant universities were also envisioned as a means to prevent the "brain drain," mostly to the East, that accompanied the outmigration of people from rural states seeking higher education. At the time of the passage of the act, only about 20% of the nation's population lived in urban areas, with the West, South, and Midwest collectively notching even less than that. After the Civil War, the second Morrill Act of 1890 established funding for Black land grant colleges and universities in segregated Southern states, though not at the same amounts as were received by the 1862 land grants (Diner, 2012; Severino, 1996).

The land grant institutions became the backbone of US higher education, educating a majority of Americans seeking undergraduate and graduate degrees. It enabled residents of states newly admitted to the Union to farm, build, and get educated without having to leave home. The focus on “agriculture and mechanics”—and explicit embrace of public sector and university support for the expansion of private sector economic activity, competitiveness, and profitability—contrasted with the classical education offered at private institutions of higher education at the time. Extension services soon followed to bring education and the products of research closer to places distant from campuses and where that knowledge could most quickly be applied.

Between 1910 and 1920, the US population became primarily an urbanized one for the first time. Oregon, settled/colonized predominantly by farm families from the Missouri River valley, remained more than 50% rural until about 1930. The population of Washington, which achieved statehood some 30 years after Oregon, but was settled much more intensively thanks to eastern capital, was more than 50% urban by 1910.

By 1914, evening and weekend classes for urban, place-bound residents had begun to spring up at NYU, the City College of New York, Johns Hopkins, the University of Pittsburgh, and other higher education institutions. That same year the Association of Urban Universities (AUU) was formed to advance the interests of urban universities, universities located in cities and serving the needs of an urbanized population. Like the rural population addressed by the Morrill Act, urban universities saw themselves serving an urban population that could not uproot and depart for residential higher education opportunities distant from home, families, and work (Mulhollan, 1992; Severino, 1996).

At the first AUU meeting, urban universities were seen to be developing in a very different way than other universities: They were becoming more flexible and practical in their programs to meet their students' needs, using the city as a laboratory where professors worked with residents, and providing cultural resources for them. For example, John Dewey's famous work in primary and secondary education at the University of Chicago embodied the idea of combining theory and practice in urban universities (Crooks, 1982).

Charles William Dabney, a founder of the AUU and president of the University of Cincinnati, knew urban universities were more affordable and accessible to students who otherwise wouldn't have access to a college degree. In his first AUU address, he described the connection between democracy and higher education and how universities could be intellectual powerhouses for cities, meeting the needs of people in urban centers (Crooks, 1982).

Following the Great Depression and a second World War, the nation's cities experienced a new round of growth and change. The nation's urbanized population stalled at about 56% of the total for an entire decade, from 1930 to 1940, but by 1970, almost 74% of the US population lived in urban areas. The rapid post-WWII expansion of both cities and suburbs, along with racism and white flight, the concentration of poverty, and newly apparent environmental degradation, left cities reeling. Whereas the 1920s were an age of great urban optimism, the 1950s brought with it a new sense of urban crisis (Diner, 2017).

Beginning in the 1950s, the urban university idea expanded, adding response to the urban crisis alongside meeting the higher education access needs of urban populations. Whereas early ideas of the urban university dealt primarily with access by virtue of location in

an urban place, the evolving mission included applying research and university service to help address the most pressing challenges facing their home cities. Notably, the expectation that the urban university mission meant more than simply an urban location, but instead an evolving partnership between universities and their communities, arose at this time. Similarly, the idea that the success of the university was intimately connected to the success of the place became part of the expectation for how an urban university would behave. Starting in 1959, the Ford Foundation began funding university initiatives for addressing challenging city issues, as did the Carnegie Foundation (Diner, 2017).

Throughout the 1960s, AAU speakers repeatedly spoke of creating “urban grant” universities, echoing the model and legacy of the land grant universities in and for rural areas. Those institutions would get funding to educate urban populations based on a curriculum that focused on urban issues. Some leaders and scholars argued that the analogy was too simplistic, and that urban cores were more complicated and their universities needed an integrated and interdisciplinary agenda, whereas the land grant universities had their primary focus in agriculture and “mechanical arts” (Diner, 2012).

As part of President Johnson’s “war on poverty” of the early 1960s, the Higher Education Act became law in 1965 and secured resources for universities to address issues of poverty. “Speaking on the importance of this legislation, the president drew on the familiar land grant analogy: ‘Just as our colleges and universities changed the future of our farms a century ago, so they can help change the future of our cities.’ The act authorized substantial Federal funds to strengthen community service resources and continuing education” (Diner, 2017, pp. 92–93).

With the Higher Education Act passed, the idea of the urban grant university continued to build momentum. In 1967, Clark Kerr drew on the land grant model when he proposed that urban universities be supported directly by the federal government as “urban grant” universities. Instead of grants of land to states, urban grant universities, Kerr proposed, would be supported by direct federal funding, bypassing states and their politics altogether.

Kerr and others saw identification as urban grant universities as an important opportunity for securing new sources of funding for often overlooked and underfunded institutions (Kerr, 1967). They also saw the emerging field of “urban studies” as an important avenue for urban universities to use to distinguish themselves from their older and better supported land grant siblings, and as a means for accelerating the development of truly multidisciplinary modes and approaches needed to address the urban crisis.

At about the same time as the emergence of the urban grant university idea, Robert Woods, a professor of political science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), itself a land grant research university, suggested in a 1962 speech at a conference on urban living at Washington University in St. Louis, the idea of social science-based urban research “observatories.” Woods’ idea was supported by many policymakers, and in 1966 he was appointed undersecretary of the new federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

HUD worked with the National League of Cities in 1968 to initiate an urban observatory program. Six cities were chosen out of 58 that applied, and another four cities were added in 1970. The program required close collaboration between cities and their urban universities. The observatories investigated many areas of urban life, including citizens’ views on taxes, services,

city participation, and local issues. Professors partnered with city officials, but tension often arose between the immediate needs of the city sponsors and the more tempered pace of academic teaching, research, and service. The urban observatory model was deemed successful, but federal funding was discontinued in 1974, based on the expectation that local funding would be provided. By 1980, urban observatories had largely disappeared (Diner, 2012).

In 1970, the Organization for Social and Technical Innovation (OSTI) conducted a review of 11 identified urban universities and concluded that none of them qualified as any different than a traditional university. OSTI defined an “urban university” as an institution that provided 1) learning access for the local community; 2) curriculum and degrees focused on benefitting the local city population; and 3) assistance to the local city and government. OSTI was surprised at the inconclusive effects that “urban universities” had had on their city environments: “Our basic rather pessimistic conclusion is that universities are unable to respond centrally to the demands of urban constituencies to the urban crisis” (OSTI, 1970, p. 3 as cited in Severino, 1996, p. 303).

In 1980, Ernest Spaights, professor of psychology at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, outlined a comprehensive and detailed urban university framework that was responsive to the specific needs of its community. “Urbanness must be the standard by which an urban institution sets all its priorities” (1980, p. 370), Spaights explained, and the urban university must be accessible both educationally and geographically, and its curriculum and teaching aligned with the university’s connection with the city. Courses could be taught at multiple locations, including remedial classes. He felt the comprehensive urban university

model needs to recruit faculty who are excellent scholars and who also have community-engagement interests. Graduate programs should be offered as they apply to an overall urban perspective and curriculum design. Funding for research by faculty should be funneled toward urban-emphasized endeavors, with more of a focus on community research than on published papers.

Spaights warned that urban-oriented academicians would tend not to fit into the traditional hierarchy of university systems and may be more difficult to manage. Urban university students tended to be nontraditional, too, from lower income and working-class communities. For this reason, volunteer activities for students should be credited. Attention to part-time adult students—day care, night and weekend classes—were vital. Counseling needs would be more complex with flexible hours required. University events should involve students as both active participants and observers, and facilities should be shared with community groups when not being used. The urban university should “permeate its institution with an academic zeal for urbanness. The outcome of such focus and effort should be an urban university of quality” (Spaights, 1980, p. 374).

The Urban Grant University Act of 1979 was signed into law by President Jimmy Carter in 1980. Had it been funded, it would have provided the direct federal funding for urban grant universities envisioned by Kerr and others. In 1986 it passed again, with changes. The legislation focused on strengthening local students’ access to education; developing professional and graduate programs; and growing active relationships with the cities in which the urban universities were situated. In 1984, Atlanta Mayor Andrew Young wrote “the universities can learn from the cities as much as the cities can learn from the universities” (Young, 1985, as cited

in Diner, 2017). Again, Congress never provided funding. Since then, the term urban grant university has mostly been dropped in favor of urban university (Diner, 2017).

In the early 1990s with the costs of university education rising precipitously and the economy stumbling, there were new calls from the public for accountability from universities (Mulhollan, 1992). Sheldon Hackney, University of Pennsylvania president from 1981 to 1993, echoed many other educational leaders when he announced, “We will be expected to contribute in directly understandable ways to the solution of pressing public problems. . . . For universities to stand aloof from the task of revitalizing our nation’s schools and communities, when society has clearly decided that it is an urgent priority, simply will not be tolerated” (1994, p. 9 as cited by Wiewel et al., 1996, p. 127).

Paige E. Mulhollan in 1992 emphasized that the metropolitan university is important both for our times and also from an historical perspective. She described Harvard and the University of Michigan and UC Berkeley as national research institutions that aren’t metropolitan universities even though they are situated in urban areas. She identified a metropolitan university mission as one that embraces a leadership role in addressing local urban issues. According to Mulhollan, a public expectation for universities to work to solve complex city problems is valid and the metropolitan university model that focuses the needs of the local university region in its mission and practices is essential (Mulhollan, 1992).

If sufficient numbers of universities adopted the metropolitan university model, Mulhollan argued, it could become an accepted higher education institutional framework. The model would be successful if university leadership actively engaged students, faculty, and staff around the concept. Since faculty and students are accustomed to traditional higher education

institutions of research universities and liberal arts colleges, selling the metropolitan model would be challenging. The metropolitan university should measure itself with its own metrics instead of measuring in comparison to research universities or liberal arts colleges, because they are very different entities (Mulhollan, 1992; Ramaley, 1996). In 1990, a “Declaration of Metropolitan Universities” was created and signed by 49 universities. However, without funding to support an urban university model, the urban university mission began to recede, with evaluation of urban universities inappropriately occurring through a research university lens (Mulhollan, 1992; Ramaley, 1996).

Claire Melhuish described the role universities in Europe and the United States played in the first half of the 20th century supporting and upholding the national interests of their countries. That changed in the latter part of the 20th century, when universities changed their focus during postcolonialism to a global viewpoint combined with a connection to their local urban environments.

Universities became anchors for their local city economic activity and international nodes as well, connecting their city to other cities across the globe through international scholarship. Universities have become neoliberal institutions, relying on corporate and foundation funds. They are expected to be leaders in driving a competitive, globalized market focused on research that moves industries into the future. As the world has shifted from an industrialized economy to a knowledge-based economy, universities are often centered in that movement (Melhuish, 2020).

Judith Rodin served as president of the University of Pennsylvania from 1994 to 2004. In the 1950s and '60s, as urban renewal became part of the federal response to the urban crisis,

universities like Penn began to work with the cities they were in to take advantage of this new tool. Penn, working with the City of Philadelphia, acquired large swaths of the surrounding neighborhood. In the 1970s and '80s, Penn didn't connect with its neighborhood much—it simply wasn't a priority, and much of the land taken for urban renewal had yet to be transformed into more than vacant lots.

As president, Rodin sought to use the power of her office and the wealth of the university to create a new and more productive relationship with the surrounding neighborhood. A committee on urban initiatives was formed that had the same status as other upper-level university board committees. All departments were involved to foster university-wide commitments to the neighborhood. Centering leadership in administration helped keep the initiative front and center (Rodin, 2005).

2) The Urban University: A Working Definition

Since the early 20th century, the urban university idea has evolved from simply universities in urban environments to universities as anchor institutions providing access to higher education and working collaboratively with local partners to make the shared urban place more successful. Today, with more than 85% of the US population living in urban areas, an urban focus has become almost ubiquitous in higher education, even for land grant universities.

Still, the tension within higher education between the elements of traditional universities, and the self-replicating nature of their research and degree programs, and those of place-oriented institutions, urban and rural, remains. The following chart compares some of the ways that distinctions have been made between traditional and urban universities:

	URBAN UNIVERSITY	TRADITIONAL UNIVERSITY
MISSION	Access, research, and service to advance the prospects of the urban community; urban mission	Teaching and research to create knowledge, educate students, advance fields; Carnegie Research 1 (R1) aspiration
CURRICULUM	Profoundly interdisciplinary, urban studies as a core	The liberal arts, specialization within disciplines
PLACE	In the city, accessible, porous boundaries, of the city and committed to a specific place, local focus	Can be anywhere, cloistered campus, bucolic setting, not committed to any single place, global or at least national focus

In short, the central question for asserting urban university identity hinges on whether the institution relates to its city environment in a deliberate and integrated way (Diner, 2017; Severino, 1996). In the 1970s, the Carnegie Commission stated, “Good universities are not only of but for their cities” (Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, 1972, p. 5 as cited in Severino, 1996, p. 301). However, what, exactly, that entailed and whether it would result in providing urban universities with distinct roles and images remained to be seen.

Today urban universities have aspired to Carnegie Research 1 status, and traditional universities have provided nearby cities with valuable research and support. Early 20th century notions of what universities are and how those ideas have evolved do not necessarily provide the kind of distinctiveness for urban universities once envisioned in 1914. Nonetheless, universities that have tried to balance both a traditional model and an urban university model have met with limited success (Waetjen & Muffo, 1983).

While traditional universities encourage specialization, urban university frameworks recognize the need for interdisciplinary connections and relationships as critical to solving urban issues (Ramaley, 1996). Student engagement in community-based projects enhance the relationship between university and city (Fouad et al., 2020). Strong correlations exist between student service learning and higher GPAs and graduation rates (Yates & Accardi, 2019).

The university/community partnership is essential to a thriving urban university framework and requires 1) planning and commitment to build long-term relationships and trust; and 2) recognition of the mutuality of the partnership and the expertise the community brings to the relationship (Yates & Accardi, 2019). There is much focus today on how anchor institutions, including universities, museums, and hospitals, can partner with business, government, city residents, and others to strengthen cities together (Diner, 2017). Cities have also been encouraged to see themselves in a global rather than national context—a larger and more inclusive frame (Diner, 2017).

In sum, today we find the following conditions associated with what we've come to know as an urban university:

- Located in a city and/or metropolitan region, both physically and in the minds of its students, staff, faculty, leadership, alums, neighbors, and sectoral partners.
- Committed to providing urban residents with access to higher education close to where they live, work, and have family and other support networks, and preparing their students to be successful participants in the local economy and valued members of the community.
- Aware of the conflicting aims of the research university and the urban university, and committed to realigning rewards and incentives, business and planning practices, career paths, hiring criteria, and other factors needed to ensure that the urban university is distinctive among institutions of higher education for its urban mission and place focus.
- Focused on the interdisciplinary reality of urban life and acting to ensure that traditional disciplinary views of the city do not stand in the way of cultivating interdisciplinary approaches necessary for addressing the needs of the contemporary urban community.
- Fundamentally organized around integrating urban community needs and aspirations into teaching, research, and service activities and carrying out those activities wherever possible through partnerships spanning university/community boundaries, and across public, private, and nonprofit sectors.

3) Portland State University: Portland's Urban University

Portland State College (PSC) was created in 1946 as an extension campus of the Oregon State System of Higher Education to serve returning GIs seeking post-secondary education thanks to the GI Bill. Almost immediately, debates began regarding PSC's future, and what role, if any, would be played by Oregon State College and the University of Oregon in meeting the higher education needs of the metropolitan region. Originally located in Vanport, the PSC campus was lost to the catastrophic floods that claimed Vanport in 1948. The college relocated first to the Oregon Shipbuilding Corporation in St. Johns and then, finally, to the old Lincoln High School building on the South Park Blocks and has developed its campus around that building ever since.

Portland State has had the urban mission baked in from the beginning. It started as part of the Oregon Extension Center, operating directly out of the Chancellor's office, to bring higher education directly to returning soldiers and facilitate the use of tuition benefits offered by the GI Bill. Access, a central component of the urban university idea, was the reason why Portland State exists today, and the idea that this was a different kind of institution was evident to both students and faculty.

Gordon Dodds, Portland State's first "University Historian," noted that the students themselves understood the value and opportunity being provided to them in the community within which they lived and worked (Dodds, 2000). Dodds quotes then-engineering student Wally Priestly, destined to become a populist stalwart in the Oregon State Legislature, cautioning his fellow students to understand Portland State as a different kind of college:

I am disturbed by the perpetual bombardment of those concerned with the school spirit of our college. Portland State is neither a high school where group activity is an expression of youthful conformity nor a campus college where the student sphere of activity is somewhat dependent on school regulation. Portland State is a city college.

(Dodds, 2000, p. 87)

As Dodds relates, the transformation of the Vanport Extension Center into Portland State University was a struggle that took place over 23 years, from its founding in 1946 until its transition from college to university in 1969, and in a way continues to the present day. None of the other public universities in the state, or the Chancellor, wanted this evolution to take place, seeing it as competition for resources, students, and public support. Only community and legislative champions, coupled with committed and resourceful institutional leadership and faculty, were able to overcome the opposition of the other institutions and their alumni (Dodds, 2000).

To the other universities, Portland State was supposed simply to offer courses that students could then apply to majors and degrees at those other institutions. To a large degree, PSC was expected to disappear as the demand from returning GIs inevitably would wane. However, Portland State evolved in precisely the opposite direction, likely in direct proportion to the lack of adequate higher education opportunities in Oregon's largest and most densely settled urban center.

At the 1955 celebration marking both the creation of Portland State College and the inauguration of its first president, John F. Cramer, and before a gathering of honored guests including the governor of Oregon, the mayor of Portland, and business leaders, Dodds reports

that Cramer's remarks noted the "increasing importance of close links between the urban university and the larger community in which it resides" (Dodds, 2000, p. 98). At a very early stage, both the access and collaborative notions at the heart of the urban university idea were at play in this young institution.

Emblematic of Portland State's ongoing struggle, though, was the creation of the curriculum for the new PSC itself. With Portland State College no longer a remnant of the extension system, PSC had to present its new curriculum in 1955 to the Chancellor for approval. The Chancellor, aware of the antipathy toward PSC on the part of U of O and Oregon State College, circulated the proposed list of courses to them, resulting in what Dodds called an uproar. The Chancellor then went so far as to appoint a committee of U of O and OSC faculty members to pare down the proposed list of PSC courses (Dodds, 2000, p. 96).

That the city reciprocated the interest shown by PSC in its Portland location was evident in the early years of the college. In January 1962, Mayor Terry Schruck wrote to the State Board of Higher Education asking that Portland State College develop a "curriculum leading to a degree in the field of city planning." The mayor noted that two-thirds of the US population lived in metropolitan areas and this number was going up fast. He wrote:

This huge and unprecedented growth of urban living contains a concomitant and inherent problem for the cities of America generally and Oregon specifically. If the cities of Oregon are to be able to plan for the most effective utilization of space and facilities, technically trained city planners must be available to do the necessary technical staff work.

At the present time, there are only two universities on the West Coast which offer a degree, either undergraduate or graduate, in the field of city planning.

Unfortunately for those of us in Oregon, these schools are located in those states which border us to the north and on the south, leaving a void in the middle. (Schrunk, 1962)

He went on to say, “The mass of urban problems which face Portland will provide excellent facilities for practical field work” and suggested that the board keep in mind that such a program at PSC would benefit the entire state as it grappled with the challenges of urbanization (Schrunk, 1962).

The letter quickly found its way from the state board to the desk of PSC President Branford P. Millar, who responded to the Chancellor that he had no prior contact with the mayor, but that it might be “profitable” for him to meet with the mayor to discuss the request for such a program. Meanwhile, within PSC, the memos started flying, including one from Brock Dixon, then—Administrative Assistant to Dean Swarthout and later to become Dean of Administration for the College, to President Millar suggesting that a planning program could be built on the “urban studies base” then present in the college (Dixon, 1962).

On February 14, 1962, the Dean of the Faculty, J. M. Swarthout, wrote about the mayor’s requests to President Millar acknowledging that:

This matter has been on our minds and under some discussion for at last three years. I don’t think there is any question but that we could make a large go of a planning program, and I think the demand is certainly around us.

As a matter of fact, I have been dragging my feet to keep our boys from running too fast on this matter, in view of our current heavy concentration on the standard

disciplines and our need to preserve some of that concentration for a few years yet ahead. . . .

One other small consideration: We started thinking down here a couple of years ago about the possibility . . . of bringing together under a single quasi-administrative roof 1) an appropriate curriculum in metropolitan planning and problems, 2) an appropriate set of research activities . . . , and 3) an institute, workshop, or what-have-you for appropriate people in Portland, like that for which a couple of colleges have gotten whopping grants. I am pretty sure that given the right dynamic and respectable leadership, we could attract both money and local attention in quantity. At the moment I am not averse to either! But it would take sweat and/or money of our own to get us off the ground. Knowing this college, I suspect we could do it with a lot of sweat and not very much money, rather than the opposite. (Swarthout, 1962).

This episode, starting with the mayor's letter and rapidly moving through both the Chancellor's office and PSC itself in a matter of days, shows that, like the access mission, the idea that an urban university would be fundamentally in and of its place was very much part of PSC from its inception. It also revealed the role that urban studies, as an interdisciplinary endeavor, would play in providing a bridge between the curriculum of a traditional university and the requirements of the urban world and the emerging urban crisis then unfolding.

Between the lines, we can see the tension within PSC between investing in traditional disciplinary divisions rather than in emerging urban-facing, community-serving scholarship and disciplines. The image of the traditional university has proven to be an enduring one, particularly given the fact that most faculty and administrators have been trained in them.

Additionally, the reassurance offered by Millar to the Chancellor, that he had had no prior contact with Schrunk, reveals the delicate position that PSC found itself in, battling for recognition, legitimacy, independence, and resources within the Oregon system of higher education.

In addition to the urban crisis, a major evolutionary force throughout all of higher education was the launching of Sputnik in 1957. That single event brought into focus the lack of capacity to meet the graduate education needs of the nation, its economy, and of places like Portland and Oregon. The question of graduate education had been considered at PSC since its inception. Under the rules of the Oregon system, PSC could only offer graduate programs that weren't presently offered at other Oregon state colleges and universities. By 1963, this led PSC to offer master's programs in two fields, Social Work and Teaching, but not without a lot of negotiation, intrigue, and time.

Still, between Sputnik and the urban crisis, the seeds were well planted for the expansion of graduate education in Portland. Led by State Senator Don Wilner, who represented Portland, and with the help of President Millar, the Oregon State Legislature passed Senate Joint Resolution 8 in 1963, which called for a "quality program of graduate education" in the Portland metropolitan area, and for the legislature to develop a funding proposal to do so for the 1965–67 biennium (Dodds, 2000, p. 170). Governor Mark Hatfield was a proponent of a public/private research university, a project that had been underway since 1957 and what ultimately became the Oregon Graduate Center, but Wilner and other PSC proponents used SJR 8 as a means to accelerate action to fulfill the unmet graduate education

and research needs of the region and the nation, and to enable PSC to play a central role in meeting those needs.

In a 1965 presentation to the Subcommittee on Research and Graduate Education of the Educational Coordinating Council for Oregon's State System, Frederick Cox, PSC's first Dean of Graduate Education, started by noting that graduate education would move to the "urban environment," home to more than 70% of the US population. He reminded the committee that:

Culture, commerce, and government make their home in the city complex and draw their vitality from it. Their wellspring of community knowledge is the urban-based college, with its community program of service, research, and study. . . . The Portland metropolitan area is unique in its lack of a state-supported university with its full complement of programs, graduate study, and research. Many agencies have pointed to this deficiency. (Cox, 1965)

Cox went on to suggest that, as President Millar already had, the emergence of Portland State College as a "city grant" institution, modeled on the land grants, could create a compact among all colleges and universities in the region to meet the needs of the community:

A state institution, designated as a city-grant college, might involve its resources in the following three areas of urbanism: (1) in teaching, with the development of specialized courses and curricula, the assignment of staff jointly to planning and teaching, the creation of interdisciplinary approaches and the development of new specializations, and the bringing of "urban consciousness" generally to faculty and students; (2) in research, with the development of projects bearing especially on problems of the local community in light of available knowledge and that which may be developed; (3) in

extension, with a variety of community services including cooperative projects with private and public agencies and social groups, conferences, continuing education, and the development of apprentice and in-service training.

These goals are consistent with the fundamental condition of Portland State College as a public, urban institution established to serve a particular metropolitan community. . . . Finally, Portland is an ideal laboratory for the development of a city-grant experiment and this fresh educational concept: large enough to have many problems, but small enough for them to be well-defined, grasped and dealt with in a fairly comprehensive manner, as a totality. (Cox, 1965)

Ken Gervais, a 1961 PSC graduate who went to Claremont to get a graduate degree in Political Science and returned to teach at PSC in 1964, reports that in 1965 he met with Jack Swarthout, Dean of the Faculty, to impress upon him the importance of creating a real urban studies program. Gervais found that PSC's urban studies curriculum of that time was just a collection of existing courses from a range of disciplines. He urged Swarthout to create a more intentional program to take advantage of the emerging national interest in urban problems and futures (K. Gervais, personal communication, December 2021).

Though the state legislature did not develop a funding package for the expansion of graduate education in the Portland region in 1965 as envisioned by Senator Wilner and other proponents of SJR 8, the momentum to "solve the problem" of graduate education and research led PSC to propose new PhD programs in Social Work and Urban Studies in 1967, and with the legislature's approval in 1969, to transition Portland State from a college to a university. From its inception as PSC, the "urban university" nature of Portland State was used

both as a means for distinguishing it from other institutions, to garner essential public and political support, and to help create what we'd call today the "brand" for what was a rapidly growing and evolving institution.

In 1970, the City embarked on the creation of its Downtown Plan. After moving to the Park Blocks in 1952 and renovating the old Lincoln High School into the first building on what would become the Portland State campus, the college expanded rapidly. Between 1955 and 1969, 26 buildings were added to the campus, with square footage increasing to 1,985,366 from the initial 135,052 (Dodds, 2000, p. 101). By 1964, PSC was participating with the City in federally funded urban renewal, leading to conflicts between the young institution and its neighbors. Traffic, the impact of students seeking housing, the lack of services and commercial establishments sufficient to meet the new demand, and the impact on the park blocks themselves were all issues of the time.

Consequently, Portland State was of specific interest to the Citizens Advisory Committee that created the goals and objectives for the Downtown Plan. A subcommittee on PSU and the Park Blocks, chaired by realtor Squier Smith and including PSU VP of Planning Robert Low and Stan Amy of Portland Student Services INC., among others, took up issues ranging from the responsiveness of PSU's curriculum, research, and service to community needs to the potential leasing of university space for retail purposes. An article in the *PSU Vanguard*, the student newspaper, reported that the PSU and Park Blocks Task Force of the Citizens Advisory Committee to the Downtown Plan found that "PSU, as an urban university, should interact more with the rest of the community." It went on to quote Squier Smith saying:

“PSU, right now, is an island . . . and the thrust of the committee’s proposals is toward making the university more responsive to the community.”

There is a lot of built-up hostility to the university, Smith believed, and he fears friction if this distrust of PSU is allowed to continue.

To encourage interaction between PSU and the larger community, the task force recommended the university provide a service and research resource for the community: “Academic activity and fieldwork should be directed more toward ‘real’ problems which relate to the public interest.” (Mantia, 1971)

The subcommittee went on to recommend that PSU be regarded as a neighborhood in downtown, not as a separate entity, and that issues of housing, transportation, parks, and other features and services be regarded as of community interest.

The work of the subcommittee brought specific goals for PSU and its neighborhood into the Downtown Plan. That document included the following “General Goal” for PSU:

Portland State should be an “urban university.” By this phrase we intend to imply far more than a fact of location. We believe that PSU and the city should be consciously aware of, take advantage of, and in fact emphasize their impact on each other. (City of Portland, 1972, p. 10).

Portland State was included within one of the 21 planning districts created by the Downtown Plan. Specific goals spoke to encouraging great interaction between the university and the greater community in all aspects of its physical and academic development; minimizing congestion in the area by encouraging walking, biking, and public transit and decreasing planned parking ratios; providing “maximum access” to the park blocks cultural area for both

the public and students; minimizing the impact of students on the housing market; and looking closely at zoning in the area around the university to ensure that speculative uses rather than longer term investments weren't occurring as a result.

In the "Plan Concept" for the Portland State University District, the general character of what was desired in the area was described as:

An area of intense day and evening activity for both educational and community functions, the University district is clearly defined by its institutional function and design. While the University should have its own identity, every attempt should be made to integrate its activity into Downtown. (City of Portland, 1972, p. 74)

The plan went on to call for the coordinated development of the district, resulting in the provision of needed commercial development and the retention of existing housing resources.

The adopted 1972 Portland Downtown Plan brought this concept of the urban university, of PSU as Portland's urban university, into official City policy. The impact of the plan is clear, and has resulted in a downtown that made a lot of "right" moves when a lot of others made other choices (Abbott, et. al., 1998; Seltzer, 2014). That the language of the "urban university" and the expectations for an urban university were featured in this 1972 planning effort should be no surprise: The entire history of Portland State revolves around the use of urban university concepts, language, and imagery in the quest to distinguish it among Oregon colleges and universities and to garner needed support for the evolution of a small extension center into a major university and central city landowner.

The evolution of PSU and of its role in this community has continued since the 1972 Downtown Plan. In 1972, Nohad Toulan, the "father" of PSU's College of Urban and Public

Affairs, was hired to manage the university's portfolio of urban studies, research, and community service initiatives. In addition to developing the School of Urban Studies and Planning, which is named for him today, and building the College of Urban and Public Affairs over a period of three decades, he was vitally active on behalf of the development of PSU itself, serving as the chair for both the Campus Planning Committee for the 1979 PSU Development Plan and the strategic planning effort of the early 1980s that called for PSU to become, among other things, a "comprehensive research university" (Dodds, 2000, p. 437). The significance of this last bit of language has to do both with a commitment to a traditional university path within PSU as well as to the ongoing effort to defend PSU from the efforts of its southern neighbors to pigeonhole the institution as something other than a comprehensive university.

By the latter half of the 1980s, the lack of graduate education attuned to the emerging high-tech industries in the Portland region once again became an item of interest to an Oregon governor, this time Neil Goldschmidt. Goldschmidt appointed a Commission on the Future of Higher Education in the Portland Region to consider ways to increase the number of well-educated residents able to both participate in the economy and help to solve the major issues confronting the metropolitan region. The commission found that "Greater Portland is one of two of the nation's 33 largest metros without a comprehensive offering of PhD programs, one of two with no major research library" (Governor's Commission, 1990, p. 7). The commission recommended that Portland State be understood as Oregon's "urban grant university," along the lines of earlier formulations of that idea dating back to the 1960s.

The 1991 PSU Strategic Plan, initiated and championed by PSU President Judith Ramaley, refined this understanding of the urban mission and encapsulated it in the university's

mission statement and subsequent reforms. Acknowledging the work of the Governor's commission, the plan went further to formally reassert PSU's urban mission:

The Governor's Commission on Higher Education and the Chancellor's Action Plan for implementing the Commission's report have presented Portland State University with opportunities for leadership and development unparalleled in its history. The new vision for the University defines an institution that will increasingly serve as the center of an educational network, developing tomorrow's leaders and ensuring access for all citizens of the region at every stage of their lives.

Portland State University, as an urban institution, has an expanded mission beyond that of the traditional university. Like any major university, it maintains a commitment to excellent scholarship in its programs of research, teaching and service. But the University also is committed to addressing complex urban issues which can only be served through the kind of multidisciplinary programs that are the hallmark of Portland State. The metropolitan setting provides both the opportunity and the obligation to project substantial energies beyond institutional walls, to bring together scholars and community leaders in order to respond to the needs of the community.

(Portland State University Strategic Planning Committee, 1991, p. 7)

And:

The mission of Portland State University is to enhance the intellectual, social, cultural and economic qualities of urban life by providing access throughout the life span to a quality liberal education for undergraduates and an appropriate array of professional and graduate programs especially relevant to the metropolitan area. The University will

actively promote development of a network of educational institutions that will serve the community and will conduct research and community service to support a high quality educational environment and reflect issues important to the metropolitan region. (Portland State University Strategic Planning Committee, 1991, p. 9)

Looking ahead, the Strategic Plan committed PSU to even deeper community connections, not just in the city but throughout the metropolitan region:

Portland State University, since its inception, has been both in the city and of the city. The University has sought advantages from cooperation with metropolitan institutions, agencies, and portions of the community. . . .Over the next five years, Portland State University will broaden and deepen such collaboration, actively reaching out into the community to help identify needs and points of useful shared action. It does so in response to the pressing needs of the region. (Portland State University Strategic Planning Committee, 1991, p. 14)

With a renewed sense of its urban mission, PSU adopted its now-familiar motto, “Let Knowledge Serve the City.” As was the case throughout Portland State’s history, this Strategic Plan served to distinguish PSU and its mission within the state from its higher education cousins while providing it with the leverage needed to undertake both internal reforms and external realignment. Yet, as is the case nationally, the tension between striving for Carnegie Research I recognition, on one hand, versus a place-based, locally serving urban mission, on the other, remains fully in force.

The City, too, has continued to plan. In 1988, the Central City Plan was adopted to acknowledge the spread of downtown functions and activities north, south, and east of the

area addressed in the 1972 plan. In 2020, Portland adopted Central City 2035, a reassessment of its downtown goals in light of the tremendous physical and economic growth of the greater downtown area that occurred in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Whereas PSU was addressed as both a district/landowner and urban university in the 1972 plan, it was identified primarily as a physical district unto itself in these more contemporary efforts. This could be due to the changing nature of planning and of expectations for what a downtown plan addresses, or a change in fundamental relationships between PSU and the region, or both. In any case, PSU engagement through teaching, research, and service has blossomed during this period.

Physical university campus planning has continued as well. The university district received significant attention in the early 2000s. Though land acquisition halted about a decade ago, the redevelopment of existing buildings and creation of new buildings are on the immediate horizon. The Vanport Building, harking back to PSU's origins and developed as a cooperative effort among PSU, the City, and Oregon Health & Science University, opened in 2021, and a new School of Art + Design is slated to be constructed on the last vacant university-owned property on the park blocks.

4) Questions for the Future

The themes evident in Portland State’s early history—access; being grounded in this place; the infusion of “urbanness” in all that PSU is engaged in and all who are engaged in PSU; vital engagement between PSU and its downtown neighbors and neighborhood; and interdisciplinary approaches matched to the multifaceted nature of urban issues—were part of all that has come since. Simply put, Portland State grew as an urban university, and it remains an urban university today.

That is not to say that PSU is only an urban university. Like all urban universities, PSU has built and retained strong allegiances to both urban and traditional university norms. Sometimes they conflict with each other and sometimes they complement each other. From time to time they cloud public understanding of the university’s mission, but both are woven into the fabric of the institution that PSU is today.

Today, the urban crisis is not the only crisis we face. Old challenges for Portland remain, but they’ve been joined by a range of others—climate, equity, justice, equality, civic engagement, to name a few—that apply to urban, suburban, and rural communities, and whose “solutions” will not be easily found within the jurisdictional boundaries of the City. Today, as we approach the 50th anniversary of the Downtown Plan, we have the opportunity to celebrate that landmark by contemplating what our next 50 years might hold.

What will the next 50 years of being Portland’s urban university be marked by? What should PSU do to ensure that the urban mission remains at the core of its identity? What should the region expect from PSU? What should PSU expect from the region to make it so? Can we

create an “Urban University Compact” to mark this point in time, in this place, and with these partners?

Perhaps more to the point, what will it mean for Portland and this region to succeed in the years ahead? What will mark this as a thriving, livable, equitable, just, sustainable, and resilient place for all those who live here? When the story of this successful urban region is told 50 years from now, what will have been PSU’s role in helping to make and secure that success?

The famous American urbanist Lewis Mumford visited Portland and the Northwest in 1938 and issued the following challenge in his address at the City Club of Portland:

I have seen a lot of scenery in my life, but I have seen nothing so tempting as a home for man [*sic*] that this Oregon country. . . . You have the basis here for civilization on it highest scale and I am going to ask you a question that you may not like: Have you enough intelligence, imagination and cooperation among you to make the best use of these opportunities? (Bartholomew, 1995)

We and our region still have this opportunity. The world still awaits the answer.

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Acknowledgements: *This paper would not have been written without the encouragement of PSU's College of Urban and Public Affairs (CUPA) Interim Dean Sy Adler, and the provision by CUPA of support for Kimberly Nightingale. We are grateful for the assistance we received from Emily Ford and Carolee Harrison in the PSU Library, Bryce Henry at PSU Facilities, and staff at the City of Portland Archives for helping us find important historical documents relating to the urban university idea at Portland State and in Portland. We are also very grateful for the work of Emeritus Professor of History Gordon Dodds on the history of PSU. We are very appreciative for the time that Judith Ramaley, Rodney O'Hiser, John Southgate, Ken Gervais, Bob Wise, and Jim Irvine spent talking to us. Without the contributions of all these people, this paper would not have been written. Of course, we, the authors, are responsible for the content of this paper, its accuracy, any inaccuracy, and conclusions.*

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