

The UNIVERSITY as GLOBAL CITY

By Susan Frost and
Rebecca Chopp

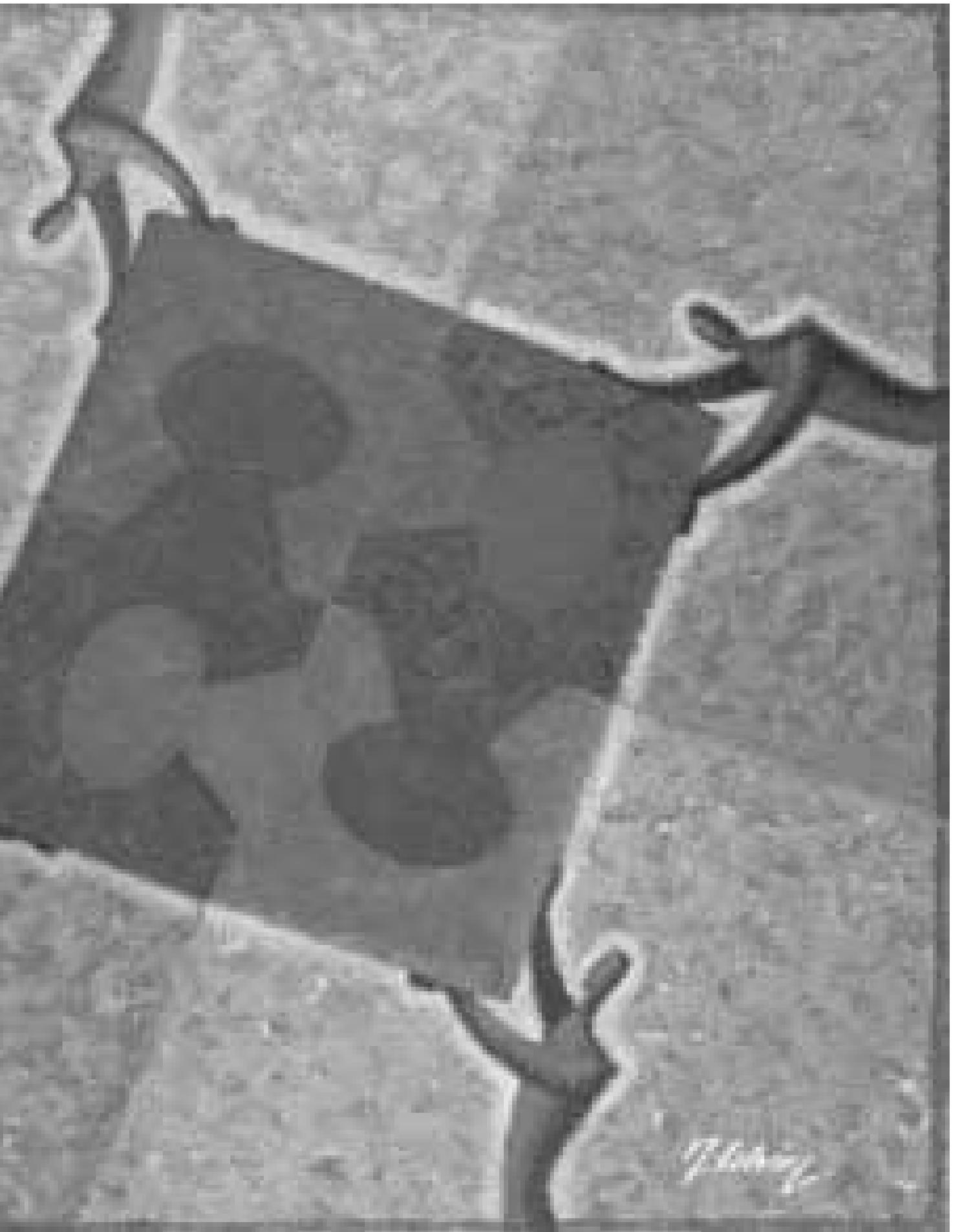
A New Way of Seeing Today's Academy

For a long time now, scholars and leaders of higher education have worried that multi-disciplinary research, semi-autonomous academic centers, entrepreneurial activity, and commercial influences may erode the traditions and values of U.S. universities, turn the academy into a disciplinary hodgepodge and an academic marketplace. But we see these emerging, collaborative parts of the university as adaptive mechanisms that help the university evolve to meet the demands for new knowledge and knowledge transfer in more original and timely ways.

For example, social and health scientists, humanists, and health professionals may decide to explore together the interplay of health, culture, and society. These scholars' initiative in building a successful cross-disciplinary program and producing cutting-edge research may enable the university to help address society's most pressing concerns, while simultaneously attracting better graduate students, more funding, and greater prestige.

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But while many leaders understand the importance of these kinds of benefits, there is more ambiguity about how to lead an institution that enables and promotes such work. Despite verbal encouragement from the top administrative ranks, scholars frequently find themselves frustrated by bureaucratic structures designed to maintain the traditional disciplines, departments, and divisions.

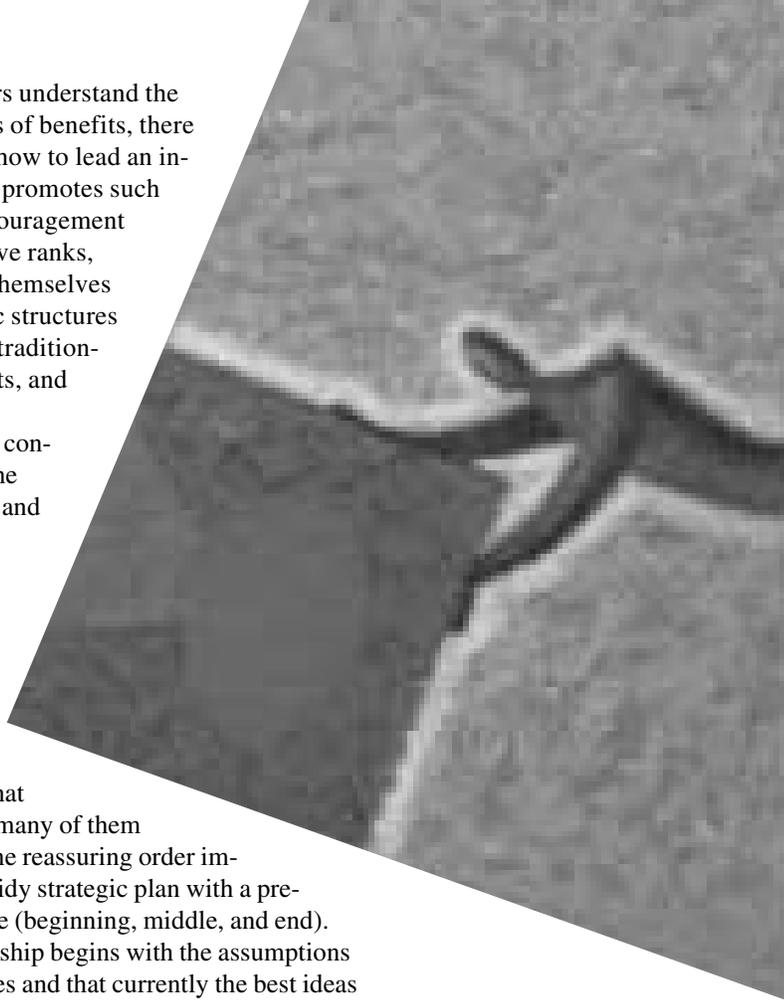
Leaders also may have conflicting attitudes toward the rise of the loose networks and blurred organizational boundaries on which the most vibrant collaborative processes depend. While presidents, provosts, and deans may acknowledge the fruitfulness of the sometimes messy churn that those processes produce, many of them cannot help but long for the reassuring order imposed by, for example, a tidy strategic plan with a predictable three-act structure (beginning, middle, and end).

Our approach to leadership begins with the assumptions that ideas build universities and that currently the best ideas are emerging from new directions within the institution. Creative leaders look for bursts of intellectual energy within the academy and base organizational change on this form of organic growth, rather than forcing that growth into Procrustean structures or merely accommodating it. As knowledge production becomes more fluid—and we become less wary of mixing the practical and the theoretical—this organizational approach assumes even greater importance.

Creative leaders also recognize the importance of their institution's culture as a source of strength. In this context, culture is defined as the habits and traditions that set the tone for an institution—that is, the specific ways that stakeholders come together or stay apart. For example, in a culture that encourages inter-faculty collaboration, a university might support frequent cross-disciplinary seminars or informal get-togethers so that scholars have plenty of networking opportunities. In this way, a creative spark may be ignited between, say, a law scholar and religion scholar who discover common interests that they would like to explore further. Without the spark, this collaborative potential might have remained forever untapped.

For a better understanding of this dynamic, in which institutional growth emerges from the inside rather than from the top, we find the work of historian Thomas Bender and sociologist Saskia Sassen on the emerging global city instructive. While universities have historically resembled both villages and metropolises, the form of academic organization we see emerging resembles what they call the global city. Each model has implications for leaders, revealing different ways to move their institutions forward.

Although we use the term “university” throughout this article, the ideas we present apply to the range of higher education



institutions, from publics to privates, from doctorate-granting institutions to baccalaureate colleges. Either a complex research university or a small liberal arts college can be a global city-like institution. What matters is how people within the organization interact with each other, how various departments or divisions connect, and how the institution relates to the world at large, from the local community to collaborators and external forces. What matters most is how ideas flow within the institution and between it and the larger world.

Our decade-long experience at Emory University, meetings with representatives of the Association of American Universities (composed of the top 63 research institutions in North Ameri-

ca), and a close study of 12 private U.S. universities reveal that institutions share similar pressures: attracting the best students, recruiting top scholars as faculty, securing great leaders (especially with the higher rate of turnover these days), and seeking increased research funding. Success in meeting these challenges depends on the university's capacity to adapt and change as new modes of knowledge formation emerge.

The University as Global City

The structures of educational institutions can resemble those of the village, metropolis, or global city. Many early U.S. universities ran more by general consensus than by strict design, a trait that characterizes a village. Leaders responded to concerns expressed openly by faculty and students, meeting pressures as they emerged instead of relying on organizational structures and hierarchies.

Before the era of departments and research specialties, higher education was thoroughly grounded in teaching undergraduates. In the words of U.S. President James Garfield, “The ideal college is Mark Hopkins on one end of a log and a student on the other.” Over time, this university-village created the systems it needed to perform this function—the curriculum, majors, and electives.

But, gradually, many colleges and universities expanded and took on the characteristics of metropolises. As research began to take precedence over teaching, structures developed to support it: resources were concentrated in formal academic departments, and faculty began to specialize in narrowly focused areas. The organization became highly differentiated

and compartmentalized in space, function, and identity. While bureaucratic structures had their uses, some of them ceased to serve the original needs they were designed for and created a set of problems, including a sense of distance and distrust between the people in the different units.

In this type of college or university, leaders managed a larger volume of students, scholars, programs, and funding. Consequently, many leaders adopted business strategies to steer their increasingly complex institutions. This approach appealed to leaders in 1983 when George Keller advocated it in his best seller, *Academic Strategy: The Management Revolution in Higher Education*.

As the subtitle implied, Keller described a way to replace collegial forms of academic leadership with strategies and structures drawn from the business community. However, intentionally or not, those strategies and structures became the driving force of many institutions, while the intellectual vigor that should be the focal point of the academic community often remained deeper in the background.

What kind of organization would better capitalize on academic strengths? Sociologist Saskia Sassen's concept of the "global city"—which came about as some cities responded to stifling aspects of the metropolis and as a way to address new social and economic conditions—provides us with a model. Global cities are not a more complex form of the metropolis. They have instead a different structure, identity, and frame for forming their identity and relating their parts.

For Sassen, fluid, flexible, open-ended structures strengthen the opportunity for stakeholders within these cities to collaborate and respond to constantly changing conditions. Rather than creating fixed structures that seem designed to dampen change (as in the metropolis), leaders find ways to recognize and humanize today's pressing challenges. They engage individuals at all levels in shaping the city's practices and culture.

We see signs that some U.S. universities are adopting the global city model in the metaphors and strategies currently being used in higher education. Permeable boundaries, partnerships, strategic sites, contextual and multi-disciplinary identities—these phrases all describe a fluid, organic orientation toward new conditions, as well as a more practical approach to solving problems.

Academic leaders have an important scholar-teacher role in this process of change. As emerging intellectual work re-

quires new institutional structures, leaders can move their institutions forward by using the global city model to support the strongest characteristics of the academy: the intellectual passion of scholars, the traditions of the academy, and the distinct values of each institution.

When leaders use these characteristics as levers for change, they advance not only their own institutions but strengthen the place of higher education in the world. By advancing the university from the inside, leaders also may prevent outside agendas from controlling their future.

Intellect as a Cultural and Organizational Force

In the last few years, we have visited a few top-tier research universities to learn why some seemed stagnant while others were on the move. At successful universities, we noticed a tendency on the part of leaders to affirm the primacy of people and programs rather than buildings and administrative structures.

For example, they spoke of *faculties* rather than schools, *inter-faculty* initiatives rather than centers or institutes.

When leaders described new programs or intellectual links, they emphasized the individual scholar's pursuit of knowledge that triggered the endeavor, rather than the structures, requirements, marketplace realities, or other factors that are naturally involved.

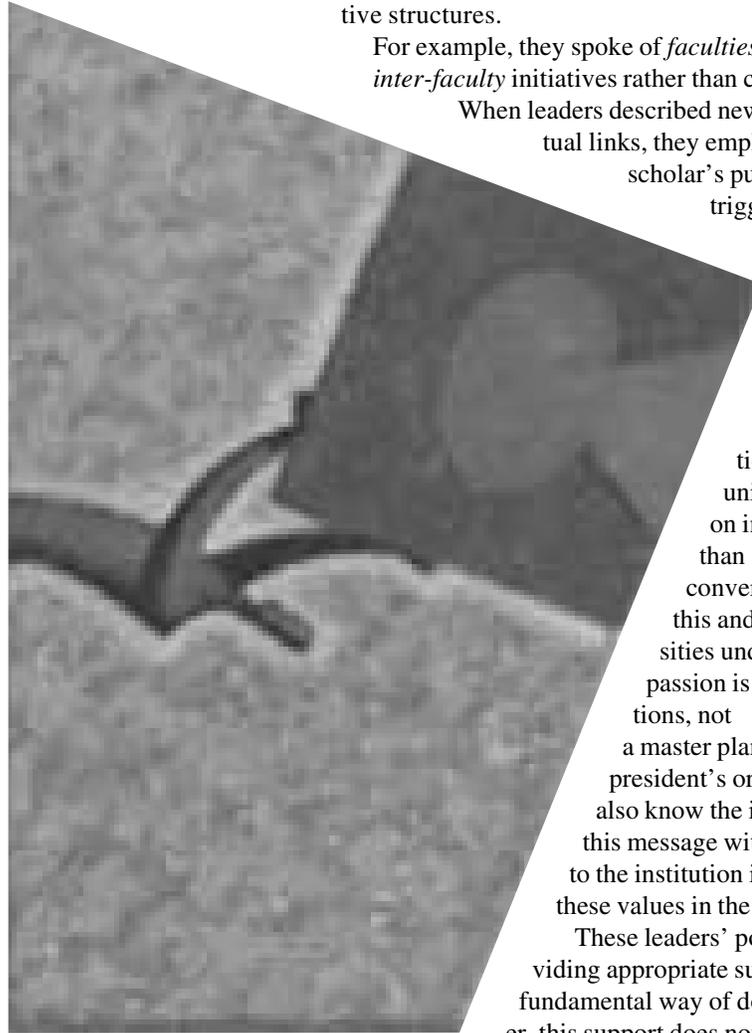
At one of the nation's most prestigious universities, this emphasis on intellectual work rather than structures infuses every conversation. The leaders of this and other dynamic universities understand that intellectual passion is advancing their institutions, not

a master plan or mandate from the president's or dean's office. They also know the importance of sharing this message with everyone connected to the institution in order to strengthen these values in the university's culture.

These leaders' position was clear: Providing appropriate support to faculty is a fundamental way of doing business. However, this support does not come in the form of traditional entitlements, but rather as resources

that faculty can draw on to support promising work. In one university we investigated, the dean's office engages new hires with the simple message that resources are available to faculty, but it is their responsibility to qualify for funding on the basis of good ideas and strong work.

Thus, from the beginning, leaders introduce scholars to a global city culture, where scholars are expected to develop new approaches to problem solving and, in many cases, col-



Metropolis or Global City: Fixed Structure or Dynamic Culture?

In the following descriptions of real situations, we see how two different provosts' offices reflect attitudes that reveal their orientation toward metropolis or global city ideas.

Metropolis-like emphasis on fixed structure. Provost Jane Doe is the chief educational and administrative officer of the university, after the president. The provost oversees academic policies and activities throughout the university. All deans report to her and she is an ex-officio member of every faculty and governing board and of all committees or other bodies concerned with educational policy or with faculty appointments or promotions.

The provost also has direct responsibility for all academic support units. She has institutional responsibility for allocating resources, and she chairs the university budget committee. She prepares the annual operating and capital budgets, working closely with the vice president for finance and administration, and presents these budgets to the president and the board.

Global city-like emphasis on culture.

The office of the provost occupies a unique and significant place at the university. The office and its provost, John Doe, stand at the intersection of faculty, staff, and student communities. Since its establishment, the office has fostered collaboration across the university and managed changes in policies and practices that affect the academic life of the university as a whole.

At present, the provost's office focuses its efforts on organizational change, cross-faculty academic collaboration, science, academic and administrative computing, core values and assets, and the well-being of the university community.

who are closer to the action, these programs have a chance to make lasting contributions to the institution's future growth.

James Bess has noted that structures designed to foster collegiality may signal the lack of a more culturally rooted form. Although he never explicitly stated it, Bess was not calling for structures to take the place of cultural collegiality, but rather to support and enable it. Our experiences seem to advance his point: While the attempt to strengthen *only* the culture is a bit like building castles in the air, it is indeed possible to create structures to give scholarly work some form. The best structures are flexible and inviting—they have more to do with local responsiveness than global uniformity.

At the leading universities we studied, the most effective structures recognize the powerful organizational differences that occur across institutions and within them. What works at Chicago, for example, might not work at Brown. What works in a scientific institute at Northwestern might not work in the social policy institute across the street. Effective leadership seems to arise from a careful understanding of and familiarity with the culture of a specific university.

Underlying these global city strategies that use flexible structures to shape a vision of the university—rather than allowing structure to be the vision—we also found methods of budgeting that add power by directly connecting responsibility, the capacity to act, and accountability. For example, at one leading university the main endowment pays for central services, and schools spend what they raise to meet their needs—including support for their buildings. Thus, the central administration leads by approving budgets, providing services, and indicating direction continuously, not by controlling funds in a more paternalistic manner.

This transparent funding method compares favorably to others where deans queue up for funds and then pay high indirect costs so that centrally located accountants and others can support the deans' related needs. By pushing these functions to the schools, the leading institutions bring clarity about spending to the center. At an institution where leaders reorganized their budget process so it became more transparent, one person said it felt "as if all the windows had opened and let in a fresh, strong breeze."

Putting the Global City Model to Work at Emory

Our study of intellectual initiatives at other universities encouraged us to harness forces that were already at play within our own institution and enable these forces to foster change that would receive passionate support from the faculty. By attending to the patterns that were already emerging, it seemed possible to develop the university more in accordance with the global city model than that of the bureaucratic metropolis.

When we turned to study what would work best at our own institution (at the time we were serving as provost and vice provost for institutional planning and research at Emory University), we were mindful of an earlier Harvard study that looked at successful models of faculty collaboration.

That study describes the Memory Work Group of the Mind/Brain/Behavior Initiative, one of five university-wide initiatives created in 1992 by Harvard's president. The memory group arose from initial dialogues among 20 or so scholars invited by their deans to discuss the possibility of working on

laborate with others to be successful. At the same time, leaders provide resources (sometimes spelled out in the hiring letter) that scholars can receive on the basis of their work.

In several universities, the president and provost have shaped university-wide collaboration by making funds available for initiatives that represent new areas and require the participation of scholars from different schools. By providing support in this way, the leaders avoid the traditional top-down directive that would have funneled resources to a particular initiative or program. Because the ideas emerge from scholars

such an initiative. As a result of this collaboration, the group produced two conferences, two books, two interdisciplinary team-taught courses, and several joint research projects. While the memory group is no longer functioning, new groups have stepped in to keep the initiative vital after more than a decade.

One of the goals of our study was to find the most promising and current centers of activity within the faculty and learn how those leaders advanced their programs. We investigated 12 programs that originated through the scholarly vision of a single faculty member or a few individuals collaborating on their own initiative (unlike the Harvard's Memory Work Group, the impetus didn't come from a dean or president).

For example, the founder of the Psychoanalytic Studies Program, an anthropologist with a background in psychoanalysis, brought together clinical and academic perspectives on psychoanalysis. Faculty joined him from law, history, anthropology, literature, and the Psychoanalytic Institute in the medical school. Even though the program was small, by the time of our investigation it had already attracted a high degree of national interest and prestige.

In another example, a biologist's vision of merging the principles of ecology and evolutionary biology with the study of infectious disease led to the creation of the Center for Disease Ecology, which also took advantage of the nearby Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. One of the longest-running programs we investigated began almost 30 years ago when a sociologist and a humanities faculty member developed an African American Studies program that continues to this day in a city (Atlanta) that has become known as a center of African American culture.

When we investigated what made these ventures successful, we learned that each began with a scholar who had a particular passion and vision for advancing knowledge. These exceptional faculty members, who combined scholarly expertise with unflinching daily commitment, were vital to the success of the initiatives—and to the future of our institution as a distinct entity.

Thus, a key element in our emerging understanding was the notion that faculty passion should shape the university. Instead of trying to be leaders who generated all the good ideas or all the forward momentum, as is characteristic of the metropolis, we began thinking of ourselves as leaders in a global city, where the focus needs to be on connecting the right people in vibrant and flexible ways.

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Several other qualitative studies about program-building strategies at our own institution affirmed our view that effective support develops from the intellectual passions of scholars, rather than spinning down from the top in artificial or bureaucratic ways. For example, a study of an eight-year faculty seminar program showed how investing in sustained and scholarly intellectual discourse across academic fields can influence teaching and research in ways we judge to be more powerful than typical administratively created faculty development programs (see our *Change* article in November/December 2001).

Our study of the fluid structures of successful universities influenced our work at Emory. When committed scholars at the university sought support to build new programs, we responded with encouragement, not a laundry list of requirements that might curtail their commitment. In our situation, we realized that in some cases the provost was in a better position to gauge the success of a program than the deans. She could match passion with modest forms of support, watch the progress of the program, and ask the deans for more formal support later in the development process when we could assess the likelihood of both success and university interest. Faculty members involved in this process understood their role in creating success and viewed the university as a helpful partner rather than a bureaucratic obstacle.

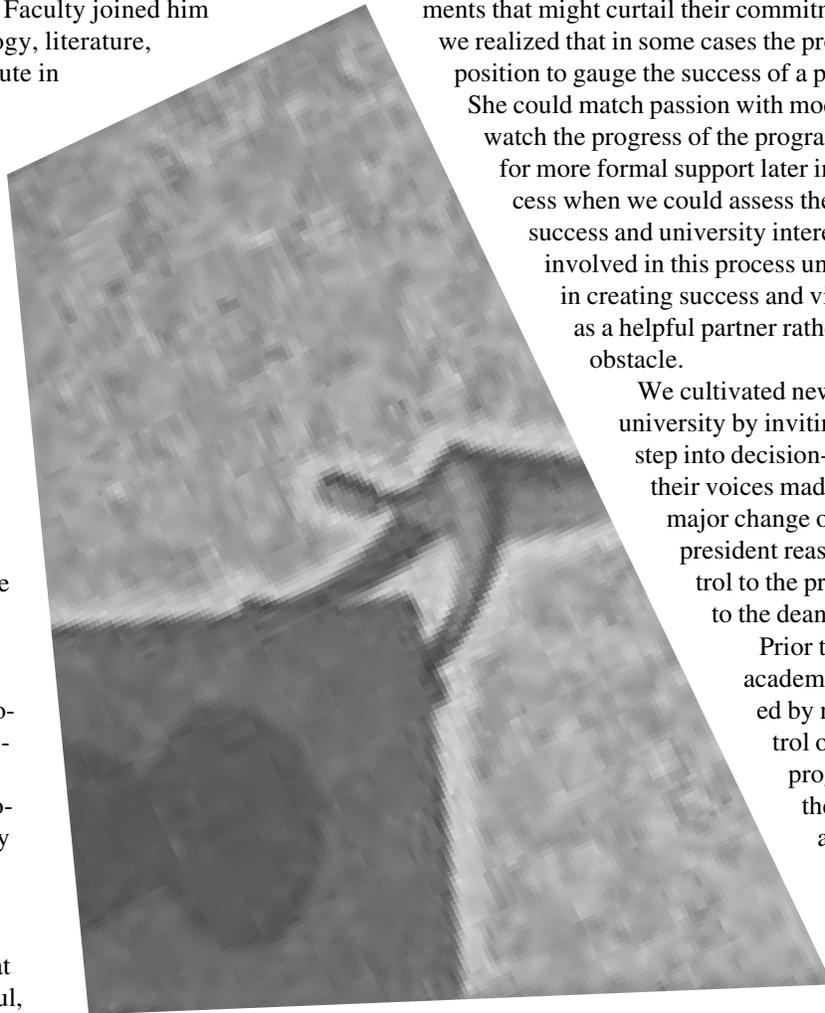
We cultivated new leadership within the university by inviting key individuals to step into decision-making roles where their voices made a difference. One major change occurred when the president reassigned budgetary control to the provost, who was closer to the deans.

Prior to this, these influential academic leaders felt frustrated by not having more control over budgetary and programmatic matters. As the provost's and deans' authority expanded they became an important new source of authority in setting institution-wide priorities and

allocating resources. Most deans

didn't receive as many new resources as they had in previous years, but some perceived a new, significant benefit—the ability to have a stronger voice in the institution's future.

We sought the trust of our community members who felt burned out by committee assignments by strengthening those groups that needed more definition and authority and disbanding others. For example, to increase the authority of one important group, we dissolved one similar to it and invited members of that group to fill the open positions in the existing group. This newly invigorated group addressed issues in innovative ways, including a discussion series that involved 300 colleagues each year.



We also actively sought to engage the imagination of our scholars, who were more likely to act on their individual passions than join a process. For example, rather than inviting faculty to a vague planning session, we invited them to lunches (many, many lunches!) around specific issues.

When we needed feedback to confront a particular problem, rather than asking high-powered individuals to engage in groupthink on a committee, we occasionally asked someone to craft a solution to a problem that could then be used by others in shaping a final action. By focusing on specific issues and individuals, we achieved more direct results and made better use of faculty time, while also earning the trust of scholars who are understandably wary of administrative processes that lack clear aims.

From the beginning, while addressing some of the university's most pressing challenges, we found it important to communicate about the institution's vision and priorities. It was especially worthwhile to remind the community that even when budgets are tight, stakeholders must get the help they need to achieve a standard of excellence. We emphasized this at every opportunity—luncheons, retreats, committee meetings—and looked for ways to enlist others in spreading the word. The message became more meaningful when it was heard from others in authority, not just one or two at the top.

An annual letter to our 2,500 faculty stakeholders was an important tool for engaging others on our journey. In a large academic community, the impact of a three-to-four-page personal letter can't be underestimated. Not only did writing the letter force us to organize and articulate our thoughts—we knew that our particular audience would prefer absorbing an informal, but well-thought-out message over watching a PowerPoint presentation. Scholars do not suffer PowerPoint gladly.

We developed new activities that would encourage an ongoing dialogue. For example, we launched a special in-house publication whose sole purpose was to strengthen the connections between faculty members by addressing life and thought in our community in thoughtful, informal essays.

Although we initiated the project, we took pains to distance it from the administration's point of view by putting it almost completely in faculty's hands. In addition to managing the newsletter and online forum, the publication's staff also coordinates events that increase the sense of collegiality across the range of disciplines and departments on campus.

To provide more support to faculty during tough times, we began relying on systematic learning about the successful programs taking place at the seams of our institution, so that

others could understand them and emulate their success. By tracking the growth of these programs backward, we learned why some succeeded and others didn't. As a result, certain programs became models, which helped form a distinct identity in some areas and also decreased the tendency to copy the patterns of our peers.

Five years after we began our efforts, the pay offs are clearly visible. Several initiatives have begun to receive national recognition, while a stronger institutional voice has challenged basic assumptions about ways to enhance the university's growth and impact. Of course, this leadership style might not be appropriate for everyone, but in these times, we all need stronger, more resilient institutions that use new ideas to shape the future.

Recommendations for Global City Leadership

The nature of cross-disciplinary research initiatives—fragile because they lack the traditional security of departments, yet resilient because they are highly adaptable—made us cautious about recommending ways to guide their development across a variety of settings. But eventually, on the basis of our study of other institutions and our experiences at Emory, we arrived at four ways in which leaders can support those initiatives: by being flexible, developing faculty leadership, maintaining communication, and providing resources.

Flexibility. One area in which flexibility is clearly crucial is in how faculty work is assigned, evaluated, and rewarded. Increasing flexibility in teaching or service requirements can help when a scholar is engaged intensely in interdisciplinary work. To help reduce the pressure of working across traditional boundaries, we also suggest adjusting reward structures when evaluating work across boundaries.

Leadership. To lower the learning curve for new faculty leaders, the university can offer informal seminars to help them learn about each other's research and identify potential areas for development. Also, universities might invite current or former leaders of cross-school initiatives to form administrative advisory committees.



Resources

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These groups could help faculty leaders avoid bureaucratic impediments and sustain precious momentum.

Communication. Program leaders need specific strategies to communicate across departments, schools, and cross-disciplinary initiatives. One way is to provide administrative support to faculty groups that disseminate information about different research interests and locate available resources to support those interests. This mechanism also helps scholars

communicate across fields.

Resources. Seed money should be made available to promising programs, with ample information about how to pursue these funds. For example, matching departmental resources with modest central funding can help faculty come together and seek external funding. The university should evaluate the effectiveness of these resources, particularly as they vary across schools, and create a database to track the progress of cross-disciplinary initiatives.

Structures for the Future

Our findings suggest that the organic structures of the university as global city should be helpful, light, and flexible, not demanding and oppressive. In fact, we are coming to believe that such terms as "planning"—or even "choosing"—are not quite accurate to describe the shaping of this new kind of university. Instead, leaders may reach their goals more readily—and find more satisfaction—by guiding the evolution and reinforcing the passions of the participants rather than forming and emphasizing organizational requirements.

But these findings raise a more compelling question: Is the university as global city a form that will endure? Or is the natural tendency to organize so strong that any system is doomed to grow into a stifling and unproductive imposition? This question is likely to challenge leaders' attempts to guide a global city-like university, but it should not deter them. By recognizing scholarly intellect as the primary impetus for growth, leaders can develop their institution's culture into a renewable source of strength for the years ahead. ☐

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