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Universities and Schools: Partners in a Diverse Democracy

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We live today in a democracy both broadly rich in its diverse human capital and deeply taxed in its ability to tap that talent and to fulfill democratic practices day to day. Consider just this partial list of significant challenges to our diverse democracy:

- The distribution of wealth is much less like the familiar bell curve than a barbell. Further, the poor are disproportionately women and members of minority groups, and patterns of de-facto residential segregation are growing not diminishing.
- The demographics of our country, and others around the globe, are changing dramatically—with growth in racial/ethnic minority groups and shifting patterns of immigration, and we are failing to educate and tap this talent.
- The concentration of poverty in our older industrial cities and isolated rural communities has translated into a cradle to prison pipeline fast overpowering the cradle to college pipeline in these communities.²
- Degradation of the environment in these older industrial cities, and in communities around this country, has mounted to such a level that it threatens not only their economic revival, but also the health and well-being of the children, suffering from epidemic rates of asthma and toxin-related illnesses.
- Inter-ethnic, -religious, and -cultural conflicts are escalating everywhere, even as the promotion of a “clash of civilizations”—more often better labeled as a clash of ignorance—spreads fear and encourages insularity.³

This is a picture of pervasive gaps and divisions. Such failures to ensure access to opportunity and to interweave the rich diversity of our communities have to worry us. In this regard, we should reconsider, with more than a little alarm, John Dewey’s definition of a democracy, a definition that is slipping away from us. Democracy, he wrote, is

¹ Address given at the University of Virginia to inaugurate its “Forum on the Academy in the 21st Century,” September 27, 2007.

² Under its Cradle to Prison Pipeline Initiative®, the Children’s Defense Fund has amassed extensive documentation of these phenomena, available on their web site: www.childrensdefensefund.org. For an overview of the initiative and the problems it seeks to address, see Marian Wright Edelman, “The Cradle to Prison Pipeline Crisis,” *Focus Magazine* 34, 6, November/December 2006, pp.1, 16-17.

³ See, for a reference to the “clash of ignorance,” His Highness the Aga Khan, keynote address delivered at the Governor General’s Canadian Leadership Conference, The Canadian Museum of Civilization, Gatineau, Quebec, Canada, May 19, 2004.

“more than a form of government: it is primarily a mode of associated living, a conjoint communicated experience.”⁴ Dewey emphasized both the essential stakeholder rights of a democracy and the essential flexibility of democratic institutions to encourage communal responsibility. He said, for example, a democratic society “makes provision for participation in its good of all its members on equal terms” *and* “secures flexible readjustment of its institutions through the interaction of different forms of associated life.”⁵ Democratic citizenship is about more than voting and owning. It is about a way of living to support each other and ensure a productive and peaceful society.

As we contemplate the future of our democracy, we must, therefore, do two things simultaneously: (1) increase access to the stakeholder shares in our democracy and therefore reduce the gaps between the haves and the have nots; and (2) learn to live together and share communal responsibility for our future.

Benjamin Franklin told the Continental Congress, before signing the *Declaration of Independence*, that if we don’t all hang together, we will surely all hang separately.⁶ And while the revolutionary aims of Franklin and his contemporaries may not apply to our present context, we do have much to learn today about hanging together. In particular, our response to the “flat world” economy⁷ must be to invest in the untapped talent for innovation in our midst, seeking to enlarge the pie, rather than just vying individually for a piece of it, in a zero-sum winner-takes-all sweepstake that we are bound to lose. We must give more people access and then we must learn to hang together.

Education in a Diverse Democracy

My message today is a simple one—universities and schools must be partners in this diverse democracy, for education (P-20) is still the royal road to enlarging the economic pie, and more significantly to ensuring a citizenry capable of hanging together in a thriving society. As universities, we should see ourselves as a forum for positive social change by embracing our K-12 partners and paving the way for our own institutions to become more diverse and more equitable along the way. When schools prosper, so do universities and in turn the benefits for society will be incalculable.

There are many motivations for this strengthened university-schools relationship, some pragmatic and others more a matter of social justice. But from practically any perspective, it is timely and we must be ready to engage this aspect of our public mission—even those of us leading private universities. We must do this to ensure a steady stream of well-prepared students, especially from our under-resourced urban schools with the fastest growing majority-minority student bodies. We also must do it to

⁴ John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 1916) 87.

⁵ Dewey, 99.

⁶ Benjamin Franklin, "We must, indeed, all hang together, or more assuredly, we shall all hang separately," in the Continental Congress just before signing the *Declaration of Independence*, 1776.

⁷ Thomas L. Friedman, *The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005).

(re)gain public support and credibility more generally, and to reverse the tide of growing disparities and divisions—racial, religious, income—in American society and reconnect with our democratic ideals. From any vantage point, firmly locking our hands and our intellectual and human and financial capital with our schools is essential to the future.

Although it is no exaggeration to state that universities have long endorsed this civic role, certainly with respect to preparing future citizens, the impetus today to engage directly with our connected communities is arguably more urgent and may require a new level of reciprocity and partnership that joins us at the hip, so to speak, with our “feeder” schools in much more significant ways than before.

Therefore, before unpacking further the case for and the nature of such university-school partnerships, I want to pause a moment and embed this public mission in some history, considering its roots and also the need for more vigorous endorsement of this public mission today.

Ivory Towers: Myth and Reality

From the academies of ancient Greece to the first, great European universities of the Middle Ages, higher education institutions have been havens for contemplation of ideal worlds—proverbial “ivory towers”—but so too have they served worldly purposes, shaping citizens for the many roles they would play in public life. Despite this history of balancing worldly and other-worldly purposes, however, over time the universities of Europe grew more aloof, as the academic disciplines grew increasingly specialized and less concerned with addressing the immediate problems of the world.⁸

When we Americans developed universities in the latter half of the 19th century, we followed that lead, building, at least in our mind’s eye, ivory towers modeled on venerable European universities and their monastic structures. This model would evolve in the United States over the first half of the 20th century to foster the articulation and institutionalization of our essential academic freedoms, and we have struggled mightily and appropriately to govern ourselves in accordance with these principles.

As Jonathan Cole, sociologist of science and former provost of Columbia University, has said about universities and academic freedom: “Two essential components—tolerance for unsettling ideas and insistence on rigorous skepticism about all ideas—create an essential tension at the heart of the American research university.”⁹ Moreover, our tolerance for that tension is a key to the world-renown success of our

⁸ For example, while Plato and Aristotle may have differed in their understandings of the capacities of individuals and the ideal, their common educational goal was to prepare people for the roles they would play in society. See Plato’s *The Republic* and Aristotle’s *Politics* for discussion of their conceptions of the goals of education. For a comparison of both in the context of an intriguing argument about Aristotle’s commitment to public education, see Randall Curren, *Aristotle on the Necessity of Public Education* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000). For discussion about the aims of medieval universities, see James Bowen, *A History of Western Education, Volume II* (New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press, 1975).

⁹ Jonathan R. Cole, “Academic Freedom Under Fire,” *Daedalus*, Spring 2005, p. 13.

institutions and it requires some stance a bit to the side of “normal” society and the marketplace pressures for conformity—in other words, our stance as ivory towers.¹⁰

However, perhaps unlike our European counterparts, our ivory towers have never been as remote as the metaphor suggests. American public higher education shaped its own distinct “brand” early on of broad access and community engagement. For example, what is probably the single most influential public policy in all of American higher education history, the Morrill Act of 1862, prompted each state to establish its own public university “to teach such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and mechanic arts...in order to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions in life.”¹¹

Note here a commitment to “liberal and practical education,” not one or the other, but also a commitment to access, explicit in the reference to “the industrial classes.” Thus, the Morrill Act institutionalized two fundamental characteristics of the American “brand” of higher education that prevail to this day, side by side with the academic freedoms we rightly protect in our “ivory towers.”

This brand was signified especially by state support for large institutions reaching widely to their residents and by outreach to community through extension services of the land-grant institutions. Over time, as you know, highly articulated state-supported systems of colleges and universities would develop well beyond the land-grants, extending the benefits and opportunities of higher education even more broadly. Indeed, some public institutions—including, of course, University of Virginia—rank today among America’s best, proving that greatness and being true to public purposes are not mutually exclusive. In fact, AccessUVA is the very embodiment of these principles—and it also happens to reflect the egalitarian sentiments of one of this state’s and this nation’s most distinguished public figures, framer of the Constitution and, later, President James Madison, who said, “Whenever a youth is ascertained to possess talents meriting an education which his parents cannot afford, he should be carried forward at the public expense.”¹²

Financial need is not the only condition for which we have found just cause to expand access. Perhaps the single most significant example is the G.I. Bill, which threw open the doors to American higher education for returning veterans on a massive scale. At Syracuse, for example, we embraced the G.I. Bill so strongly that we transformed our institution overnight, tripling our enrollment in a single year in order to accommodate World War II veterans. In that same era, we eschewed quotas based on religion, which, I should point out, ran somewhat counter to the trend among our private peers, while also recruiting Japanese American students from internment camps.

¹⁰ Nancy Cantor and Steven Schomberg, “Poised between two worlds: The University as Monastery and Marketplace,” *EDUCAUSE Review* 38, no. 2, March/April 2003, pp. 12-21.

¹¹ Morrill Act of 1862, Library of Congress web site, accessed September 16, 2007; <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=llsl&fileName=012/llsl012.db&recNum=534>.

¹² James Madison (1751–1836), U.S. president. Madison to W.T. Barry, August 4, 1822 in Marvin Meyers, ed., *The Mind of the Founder: Sources of the Political Thought of James Madison* (Hanover, NH: Published for Brandeis University Press by University Press of New England, 1981).

Today, public and private institutions across the country can point to an array of programs from affirmative action to need-blind admissions and innovative financial aid programs that continue a tradition of expanding access, as Bill Bowen urged in his Thomas Jefferson Distinguished Lectures here at Virginia.¹³ Evidence of this ongoing tradition at Syracuse can be found in many measures of socioeconomic and ethnic diversity, including the fact that more than 20 percent of our undergraduate students are eligible for Pell Grants. Like our peers, we provide considerable financial support for students to attend Syracuse, including a program recently to cover full tuition, room, and board and fees to students from the six sovereign Haudenosaunee Nations that are such an important part of our region's history, and we hope of its future. And we are not unusual, even as a private institution, in focusing on access and on critical partnerships with communities in our region.

And yet, today higher education's credibility has been somewhat eroded by contentious public debates on issues such as affordability and college costs. Further, public skepticism is exacerbated in many parts of this country, particularly in older industrial cities like Syracuse, by the persistent struggle that these communities face in transitioning from an industrial economy to a knowledge-based economy.

In the face of such challenges to our relevance, I think that we must look for inspiration in our history—the tradition of access in American higher education—and then ask ourselves: How must we adapt our conception of this traditional strength to meet the demands of the 21st century? What can we do, in the same spirit in which the Morrill Act addressed the agrarian and industrial needs of 19th-century America, to vigorously reassert the public mission of higher education in today's diverse democracy, not only to ensure a steady flow of students, but also to nurture the conditions required for a thriving and prosperous society going forward?

Laying the Ground: Schools as Farms

This question brings me back to my original message. I believe that schools must be a central, though by no means exclusive, arena for universities to fulfill our public mission and ensure democratic access and innovation that lays the ground for a just and productive society. Schools are the family farm of our economy, and just like it often took a community of farmers to raise a barn, it will take a broad and deep partnership between universities and schools to raise our new knowledge workers for tomorrow—after all, “it takes a village to raise a child” against the odds today.¹⁴

A focus on improving schools—pre-K-12—as the necessary (though now not sufficient) building block to ensuring broader opportunity and success in our knowledge economy is widely accepted in theory but largely unfulfilled in practice across this

¹³ William G. Bowen, Martin A. Kurzweil, and Eugene M. Tobin, *Equity and Excellence in American Higher Education* (Charlottesville, VA.: University of Virginia Press, 2005).

¹⁴ Hillary Rodham Clinton, *It Takes a Village: And Other Lessons Children Teach Us* (New York: Simon and Schuster 1996).

country. The state of our high-poverty, racially-isolated urban schools in many districts, certainly, for example, across upstate New York and in New York City, is so dire that report after report refers to them as “failure factories” more likely to add to the “cradle to prison pipeline” than to any pipeline to college.¹⁵

Almost half of America’s children ages five or under belong to a racial or ethnic minority. Yet despite the future competitiveness lever these children represent, we are failing to educate them. From Syracuse to South Central LA, and all across America, too many children are lost in the midst of racially isolated, high-poverty, under-resourced, and under-performing public schools. And there are consequences, summarized in a recent report with a simple statistic as follows: “...students from historically disadvantaged minority groups have only a 50 percent chance of finishing high school with a diploma.”¹⁶ Not surprisingly, therefore, the educational pipeline is leaking all along the way.

The costs of not educating these children—or as John Sexton, president of New York University, says: “magnetizing them pre-K–20, in order to turn our cities and communities into the idea capitals of the world”—are considerable. We can not hope to revive our older industrial cities and the rural economies of our towns and villages without educating the next generation in ways that allow them to stay rather than contribute to the brain drain in these communities. These have to be vibrant places to live and the children who grow up here must find hope to stay, so they can build for the future rather than perpetually be caught in cycles of poverty, and crises of poor health, inadequate education, and crime-ridden neighborhoods. This is about the pragmatics of economic revival. It is about social justice and opportunity, and, as I will suggest at the end of this discussion, it is about the realization of more equitable and vibrantly diverse colleges and universities as well.

Filling the Opportunity Gap to Turn Around the Achievement Gap

It is commonplace to analyze this dire situation through the lens of an “achievement gap” that is hard to override for a large percentage of students of color, students from low-income families, students with disabilities, and students learning English as a second language. However, increasingly, experts are taking a different tack, suggesting that it may be more accurate to refer to an “opportunity” or “access” gap. When we do this, as the education not-for-profit group—Say Yes to Education—suggests, things may not look so dire or hopeless.¹⁷ In this framework, the question to ask is whether these students would be “on track to thrive” if provided with the same resource-rich, experience-rich, and support-rich environment that most middle class families and schools provide. The answer seems to be “yes.”

¹⁵ Editorial, “The Small Schools Express,” *Rethinking Schools Online*, 19.4 (Summer 2005) http://www.rethinkingschools.org/archive/19_04/expr194.shtml; Also, op cit. Marian Wright Edelman, “The Cradle to Prison Pipeline Crisis.”

¹⁶ LaMar P. Miller, “*With All Deliberate Speed: Achievement, Citizenship and Diversity in American Education*,” Metropolitan Center for Urban Education, The Steinhardt School of Education, New York University, 2005, p. 17.

¹⁷ Say Yes to Education—New York State Access to College Pilot Program, August, 2007.

There are growing numbers of examples across the country of school-wide reform experiments that demonstrate high success rates among inner-city, low-income, heavily minority, student populations provided with environments and supports modeled on those more typically available to and accessed by their more privileged peers.¹⁸ Some notably successful examples are those schools run by the Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP), the Say Yes to Education Foundation with schools in West Philadelphia, Harlem, Hartford, and Cambridge, and the Gates Foundations' Early College High Schools around the country. The data on KIPP schools, for example, show remarkable success. In Baltimore, a city where only 28 percent of sixth graders passed the state math test in 2005, the pass rate at a KIPP school was a stunning 90 percent.¹⁹

And when universities are involved, as they are in the Say Yes schools, there is a commitment that stretches from elementary (with early literacy and support programs) to middle school (with mentoring and tutoring programs intended to put college on students' radar screens early) to high school (with emphasis in critical areas like science, math, and technology) that cements a path to college attendance.

Of course, the jury is still out on whether these same success stories can be replicated across an entire inner-city district, but there is cause for optimism based on these successes and the accumulation of evidence-based understanding of the obstacles to students thriving. That optimism is why Syracuse University, the Syracuse City School District, and Say Yes to Education are collaborating to do a district-wide demonstration project in our city.

Schools as Communities; Universities as Schools

There are many models for successful partnerships, but at their heart is the structuring of schools as “centers of community” and university campuses as schools.²⁰ When schools become centers of community, students and their families garner the kinds of social support, health care, legal, and educational services, in addition to extended learning time in after school and summer enrichment programs, that address each student's pressing needs in an individual growth plan that keeps them on track to thrive.

¹⁸ Each of the programs cited is addressing urban school reform. For information about Say Yes to Education, see <http://www.sayvestoeducation.org/about/about.shtml>. For information about The Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP) see <http://www.gatesfoundation.org/UnitedStates/Education/TransformingHighSchools/Schools/ModelSchools/KIPP.htm>. Early College High Schools are funded by the Gates Foundation, aiming to provide up to two years of college credits to students in addition to their high school curricula; more information is at <http://www.gatesfoundation.org/UnitedStates/Education/TransformingHighSchools/Schools/ModelSchools/ECHS.htm>.

¹⁹ See “KIPP Schools Shift Strategy for Scaling Up,” *Education Week*, April 12, 2006, and Sara Neufeld, “Models of middle school success; 2 charters flourish, but city rarely seeks their input,” *Baltimore Sun*, May 1, 2006.

²⁰ See Lee Benson, Ira Harkavy, and John Puckett, *Dewey's Dream: Universities and Democracies in an Age of Education Reform*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007), for a discussion of schools as centers of community.

When university campuses open up to school children, be it in programs that expose students to college life very early on in middle school, or in early college high school experiences that forge a curricular alignment, then college-going and college success begin to be a reality.

When teachers and counselors start working with faculty and admissions and financial aid experts early in the career of a student, then the maze of financial assistance can be navigated, and the investments we already all make can be turned into early incentives to stay on track. And, to tie it all together, when data are gathered not just to label students and schools as under-achieving, but as part of a coordinated evidence-based research evaluation—with comparative benchmarks and continual feedback—then we can not only hope to lose fewer of these children from the cradle to college pipeline, but also to sustain school reform efforts well into the future.²¹

Indeed, universities such as Syracuse and Virginia, with substantial strength not only in education but across the range of expertise needed to make these projects work, can play a critical role as partners with schools in reversing the trends that hamper our diverse democracy. If the failure of children to thrive in many inner-city and rural schools is at least substantially a function of a surmountable gap in “access” to experiences that ensure success, rather than an insurmountable “achievement” or “ability” gap, then we can do something about it.

Learning More Than the Three R's: Diversity and Social Capital

When these partnerships succeed, as in the ones described above, they put students not just “on track” toward college but rather “on track” to thrive *in* college and beyond. Certainly part of that formula for success (pre-K-20) is the opportunity for academic enrichment (after school, summer school, and in new curricula) all along the way—akin to what middle class families routinely provide for their children in and after school. But, as important, is the social and cultural capital that comes with these experiences, and the expectation that grows from them that college can and is a reasonable goal to attain and master.

Time and again, when you talk to students at our universities who are in the first generation of their families to attend college, or students of color in predominantly white institutions, or students for whom English is a second language, a significant piece of their ability to thrive has to do with factors beyond academic preparation. Being on track to thrive includes having some familiarity with college life that many of us take for granted. It means seeing the institution as “yours,” not just “theirs,” and seeing others like you succeed. Students who thrive have a social capital network of trusted confidants, and with that, they can comfortably explore beyond their close network in a newly diverse environment.

Successful school-college partnerships can provide students in inner-city and isolated rural communities with this critical exposure to college life. But they can also do

²¹ *Op cit.*, Say Yes to Education.

more. They can ensure experience with learning in a diverse environment for all students before they enter college. Unfortunately, many students in our nation's schools grow up *without* much experience with diversity of any kind—ethnic, racial, class, religious, cultural—and therefore they are unprepared to live in a diverse college community.²²

Schools that provide real pre-college experience with diversity are hard to come by these days. A recent report by the Civil Rights Project suggests, for example, that following years of retrenchment, by 2000, only 14 percent of white students attended multiracial schools, and almost 40 percent of black and Latino students went to schools with 90 to 100 percent minority populations.²³ And many national studies have documented the negative consequences of this resegregation in the public schools.²⁴ In fact, just this kind of resegregation scenario seems to be unfolding in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, where a school district restructuring plan has resulted in disproportionate numbers of African American students being taken out of higher performing schools and placed in lower performing ones.²⁵

Moreover, in light of the recent Supreme Court ruling (in *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District #1*) striking down even voluntary school desegregation plans, it is all the more urgent that we find ways to broaden experiences with diversity for all of our children, as young as possible, and as long as possible, before they come to college.²⁶ University-school partnerships, both in our inner cities and rural communities, and in our suburban schools, are important contexts for doing just that.

Creating Contexts for Diversity

There is a growing awareness of the role that universities can play in schools in creating the contexts for intergroup interaction that foster confidence in college-going and skills for thriving in a diverse learning environment.²⁷ The University of Michigan is playing a central catalyzing role in sharing best practices for intergroup dialogue

²²LaMar P. Miller, “*With All Deliberate Speed: Achievement, Citizenship and Diversity in American Education*” Metropolitan Center for Urban Education, The Steinhardt School of Education, New York University, 2005.

²³ Erica Frankenberg, Chungmei Lee, and Gary Orfield, *A Multiracial Society with Segregated Schools: Are We Losing the Dream?* (Cambridge, MA: The Civil Rights Project, 2003) 29.

²⁴ The NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc., The Civil Rights Project of Harvard University, and The Center for the Study of Race and Law at the University of Virginia School of Law, *Looking to the Future: Voluntary K-12 School Integration; A Manual for Parents, Educators, and Advocates* (New York: The NAACP Legal Defense Fund, 2005) 10.

²⁵ Sam Dillon, “Alabama School Rezoning Plan Brings Outcry of Resegregation,” *The New York Times*, September 17, 2007.

²⁶ See *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District #1, et al.*, No. 05-908; decided with *Meredith, Custodial Parent and Next Friend of McDonald v. Jefferson County Board of Education, et al.*, No. 05-915; accessed September 16, 2007, <http://www.supremecourtus.gov/opinions/06pdf/05-908.pdf>.

²⁷ David Schoem and Sylvia Hurtado, eds., *Intergroup Dialogue: Deliberative Democracy in School, College, Community, and Workplace*. (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2001).

programs on college campuses, and this effort is being extended to work in schools, at Syracuse, and elsewhere.²⁸

For example, our campus Intergroup Dialogue Program has been collaborating over the last several years with a long-standing community organization in Syracuse called Community-Wide Dialogue to End Racism.²⁹ In one project, we worked with teachers and students from two local high schools that have very different demographic profiles to promote better understanding of how high schools socialize students around race. A teacher in each of the high schools—one, an urban school with a history of racial tension and the other, a predominantly white school from the metropolitan area's wealthiest suburb—developed and delivered a course on race and culture in American society. Students supplemented normal coursework by participating in small group discussions—intergroup dialogues—which are based on an educational model that works to air differences, revealing alternative experiences and perspectives in a safe context of open and honest sharing. SU faculty, staff, and student facilitators guided the high schoolers through the dialogues, exploring differences in the service of building common ground, and collaborative action. These dialogues had profound effects. Students who came from the predominantly black and Hispanic inner-city school began to feel more comfortable on our predominantly white campus. Likewise, suburban white students came to grasp the heterogeneity of “out-groups” and understand what it means to try to live together in a spirit of communal responsibility.

As intergroup dialogues on many campuses show, everyone can benefit from learning in a diverse environment, and early exposure is particularly useful in the face of increasing residential segregation that isolates our inner city children from their suburban neighbors, and vice versa.

Transforming Universities by Transforming Schools

Having focused thus far primarily on the benefits to schools and school children of these partnerships, I want to conclude my discussion today with the important benefits for universities as we transform ourselves into more inclusive and equitable institutions and communities of scholars and learners.

These benefits reach far and broadly across our campuses. Clearly they impact our schools of education in profound ways that change curriculum and practices and attract diverse talent to the campus. Clearly they should over time have very positive effects on our recruitment and retention statistics for students from less affluent schools. But I believe that the benefits go beyond these direct ones to reach to our faculty and staff and the climate of our campuses as well. That is, I believe that partnerships with schools can help address some of the persistent obstacles we all face in maintaining diverse campus communities.

²⁸ Patricia Gurin, *Educational Benefits of Intergroup Dialogue*, unpublished grant proposal, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, August 2004.

²⁹ “Community Wide Dialogue to End Racism: Stories from the Dialogue,” Central New York Community Foundation, January 2007.

Let me start with the faculty and staff we hope to retain on our campuses. There isn't a campus I know that doesn't speak of a revolving door of faculty who are coming to campus from groups or backgrounds typically under-represented in their fields. There are numerous reasons and even more individual narratives behind the revolving door, including: the pressures on individuals when there isn't a critical mass of similar others; the difficulties in leaving social identities and allied community connections at the door, as we often expect people to do; and the gulf between their own experience and that of the typical student in their classrooms. All of this conspires to create a climate not conducive to thriving, even as some faculty and staff do indeed persevere and flourish. But not enough, as the national statistics suggest.³⁰

It is my experience that school-university partnerships bring several immediate benefits for all faculty and staff who get involved in them, but particularly, I would suggest, for those who themselves feel isolated on campus by virtue of their backgrounds or minority status, be it as a member of an under-represented group, a first-generation scholar, or for many other reasons. For them, connections to students from schools and communities can surface resonant personal narratives that go a long way toward creating a context of solidarity often missing on campus. It is hard to tell, for example, in many of these programs, who gets more out of the interactions—the instructors, with their own stories to tell, or the children. The opportunity here to not have to leave one's identity at the door, by being able to feel connected to one's past and community—even in a very different setting—is profound.

Schools are indeed centers of community, and many faculty members, from all backgrounds and groups, find it deeply invigorating, intellectually and ethically, to be part of the revival of communities. The same, of course, can be said of many kinds of public engagement projects in many communities around the globe, but we should not ignore the communities to which our institutions are connected by proximity, or the schools that produce the next generation of our college students.

And speaking of our college students, their direct engagement with schools can also be transformational, with positive reverberations for the climate on campus and the richness of intergroup dialogue among diverse student groups. When school children and youth come to campus, or college students go to the schools, stereotypes often break down, much more nuanced views of groups develop, empathy is in greater supply, and greater commitment to pluralism as a positive feature of campus life also follows. This, then, becomes another way in which the life of faculty and staff, as well as of students, changes for the better.

At Syracuse, we have seen this so directly in the involvement of our students with the schools. For example, SU students taking a course called Queer Youth/Straight Schools, not only confronted head-on the invisibility of LGBT students in the high schools and their alarmingly high homelessness and suicide rates, but they also reflected

³⁰ Daryl Smith with Lisa E. Wolf and Bonnie E. Busenberg, *Achieving Faculty Diversity: Debunking the Myths* (Washington, D.C.: American Association of Colleges & Universities, 1996)

broadly and deeply on similar issues of devaluing, hostility, and alienation on our campus. And the compendium of recommendations they provided to the Syracuse City School District has clear relevance for our university as well.

There is something about opening up the engagements to see and face the deeply polarizing and polarized issues of pluralism beyond our own campuses that serves to crystallize empathy and commitment, with positive ripple effects for transforming universities, too. We see this happening frequently in our university-school partnerships in Syracuse. SU students who work in our literacy through the arts projects—watching, for example, school children with disabilities express themselves so eloquently through photographs and poetry—report they now find it hard to be dismissive of others’ abilities to thrive. They replace relatively automatic conclusions about *dis*-abilities with assumptions about the students’ abilities. These kinds of experiences—and I could describe many such opportunities that partnering with schools bring—are both revelatory for the college student, and often revolutionary in their side-effects on campus climate, as I imagine the student mentors in your Day-in-the-Life Program have found by personally introducing local school children to life on the UVA campus.

For us, this transformative effect on our students was driven home this spring, when two students from our Newhouse School of Public Communications pursued their curiosity about how inclusive classrooms—which integrate students with diagnosed disabilities—really function. So for their senior thesis, they made a documentary at the Syracuse City School District’s Ed Smith Elementary School, which was one of the first schools in the country to have fully inclusive classrooms.

After almost a year of listening, observing, and interviewing two fifth-graders with autism, their classmates, their teachers, parents, family members and teachers’ aids, the Newhouse students produced a 37-minute documentary called *Elementary Ed*, powerfully showing that students with special needs do thrive in an inclusive classroom and can truly be accepted as peers by other students. Equally important, it shows the beneficial effects of inclusion on all students and on the school as a whole. The documentary was so well received that the Syracuse City School District superintendent commissioned a shorter version to illustrate his 2007 State of the Schools address.

The process of creating the documentary had a profound impact on the lives of the two young filmmakers. One of them, now a professional documentary film maker in New York City, says “I’m really proud to show this documentary, and now it’s something I want to do for the rest of my life.” The other was so affected by the experience that he admitted feeling the tug of a possible change in calling saying afterward, “It opened my eyes to the education system... I felt such a part of the system that I was considering being a teacher after the experience.” This is a remarkable statement coming from a Newhouse student as they typically direct themselves almost immediately toward the media industry.

But reaching beyond his own experience, he speaks now of the broader goal—the public good, if you will—that he and his colleague came to embrace: “Our goal

ultimately was to put a human face to the stereotype that is attached to disabilities...to show people that everyone deserves to have their education....”

Therefore, as we seek to re-invigorate the traditional strength of our American institutions of higher education, building them into places of inclusion and equity for the 21st century, let’s keep that final observation in mind: Everyone deserves to have their education, and when they do, we *all* become better educated. By partnering with schools, and achieving these kinds of deeply reciprocal and broad connections with our communities, we may well transform the popular metaphor for universities, from ivory towers to open-source institutions, in a language more fitting for our information age and knowledge society. And when we do this, we will have moved a step closer to ensuring that we all hang together and thrive, rather than become diminished separately, in this inspiringly diverse democracy.