

Anchor Institutions: Connecting with Community for Innovation and Opportunity

Nancy Cantor
Chancellor and President
Syracuse University¹



On the surface, it would be hard to find institutions situated more differently than Syracuse University in upstate New York and the University of Texas in the Rio Grande Valley. We are a private university in a post-industrial Rust Belt city. For nearly 60 years, residents have been leaving the city for the hilly lake country around us, ignoring both the city's attractions and the drawbacks of commuting by car through 170 inches of snow a year. Even the SU campus, which sits on a hill close to downtown, was cut off from the city center by the construction of Interstate 81.

Here in the sunshine that in Syracuse we may not see for weeks at a time, your "Magical Valley of the Rio Grande" is still growing rapidly, coalescing along the U.S.-Mexican border in a volatile economy that has brought sharply into focus the need to broaden the base of the middle class. Higher education plays a critical role in this task, and it's a tremendous asset that the University of Texas, a great public university, has created campuses with deep roots in your communities.

But no matter how different we may appear---private and public, in Texas and New York---we both confront borders of all kinds, some geographical and others that are just as formidable. Even though Syracuse has a long tradition of fighting for justice---we were a center in the movements for abolition and women's suffrage---we're still faced with great barriers to

¹ Invited keynote address given at the Rio Grande Summit at University of Texas at Brownsville, October 6, 2011.

opportunity and hope. Here on the border, in a place of constant transition and multiple identities,² you as a university face these obstacles---and more---as you seek, in your own words, to “embrace the nuances” of the interface “where languages, monetary systems, history, and cultural mores blend and blur with one another.”³



As institutions of higher education--- whether public or private---we share a common responsibility toward our public mission. As anchor institutions in metropolitan areas with urgent needs, we must get to work on the “messy,” seemingly intractable problems that are best addressed through many disciplines and with many partners.

In these hard times, we are called to help revive our economies and our communities with a dual agenda of opportunity and innovation. This task is not new in American history. Nearly 150 years ago, President Lincoln signed into law the Morrill Act that created our land-grant university systems to develop the West and promote agriculture, which at the time employed more than half of the nation’s population.⁴

Today we find ourselves in a seemingly wired world where thousands are not connected at all. They’re barely hanging on, falling farther and farther behind in education, income, health, nutrition, and employment.⁵ This is a grievous, shameful waste of our nation’s human talent and potential. It’s time for all of us to roll up our sleeves and get to work as engines for justice and prosperity.

We can indeed be powerhouses in the creative economy. In the process, we *must* create social capital in our communities and social mobility for our current and our future students. Our excellence should be defined by the breadth of our reach. We must open our doors to the fast-growing populations of students who will be the first in their families to go to college, the sons and daughters of newly immigrated families, veterans returning from post 9/11 conflicts, and the K-12 students who are too often educated in vastly under-resourced schools.

² See Gloria Anzaldúa, preface to *Borderlands/La Frontera; The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1987), 3.

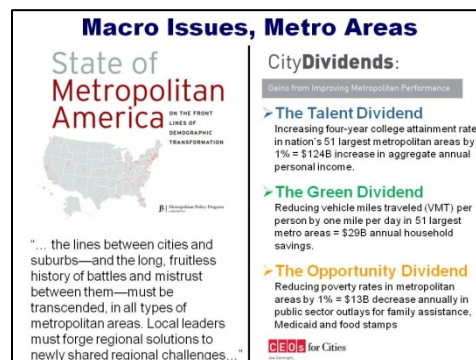
³ Juliet V. Garcia, “Letter from the President,” *University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College Strategic Plan 2008-2012*.

⁴ E. W. Hilgard, “Progress in Agriculture by Education and Government Aid,” *The Atlantic Monthly* 49 (294), 531-581.

⁵ Ken Starr, “The Soul of a College,” *First Things*, November 2010, 62-64.

Our goal is to create what the legal scholar Susan Sturm calls an “architecture of inclusion,” made of collaborative networks that are reciprocal, flexible, and sustainable. Such partnerships build trust. They validate diverse talent, and they prioritize access and opportunity. They contribute to a supportive environment on campus. Along the way, they make for authentic agendas for access, opportunity, discovery, and change---for truly making a difference in the world.

Metropolitan America: Sites for Collaboration and Civic Energy



Metropolitan areas are ideal for these collaborations because they're magnets for economic strength and creativity.⁶ The Brookings Institution and CEOs for Cities---notably, among many other national organizations---have conducted extensive studies of the state of our economy, and both point to our metropolitan areas as absolutely central to restoring prosperity. They'll lead the way to what Bruce Katz calls the “Next Economy,” one that will be export-oriented, low-carbon, and innovation fueled.

CEOs for Cities also calls for investment in our metropolitan cores and forecasts three dividends I'll illustrate very shortly.

- *A talent dividend – when we increase educational attainment.*⁷
- *A green dividend – when we follow sustainable habits.*⁸
- *An opportunity dividend – when we replace poverty with jobs.*⁹

⁶ A recent Brookings analysis shows that six metropolitan areas in Texas, including the Rio Grande Valley, are among the nation's 100 largest. These six contain 71 percent of the state's population, 71 percent of its jobs, and 74 percent of its economic output.

⁷ Increasing four-year college attainment in the nation's 51 largest metropolitan areas by one percent will yield a \$124 billion increase in aggregate personal income.

⁸ Reducing vehicle miles traveled per person by one mile a day in the 51 largest metro areas will yield a \$29 billion annual household savings

⁹ Reducing poverty rates in those 51 metropolitan areas by one percent will yield a \$13 billion annual decrease in public sector outlays for family assistance, Medicaid and food stamps.



As anchor institutions in metropolitan areas, we can and must do three things:

- We must embrace the public mission of higher education, whether we're a private or a public institution. We must partner with our communities on innovation and opportunity.
- We must change the educational odds for the talented under-represented students who are too often left behind in under-resourced schools. They're the hope of our future.
- We must create a seamless two-way street between our communities and our campuses to embrace the knowledge and the human talent that are in our midst but too often unseen and unappreciated.

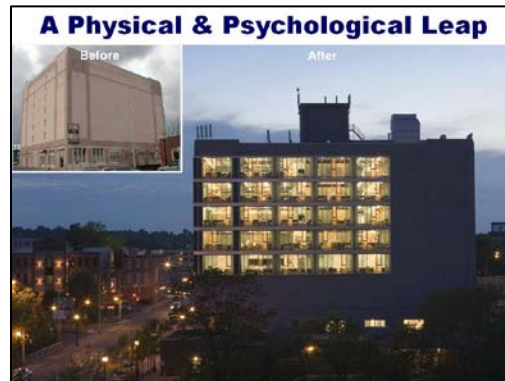
Scholarship in Action at Syracuse

This morning, I'd like to illustrate the potential of universities as anchor institutions by describing work underway at Syracuse, the place I know best. Ours is a *place-based strategy*, where we're making significant investments *in* our community *with* our community. Already, we're seeing all the predicted dividends and more. Our vision of intertwining learning, scholarship, and public engagement with many partners is called Scholarship in Action.



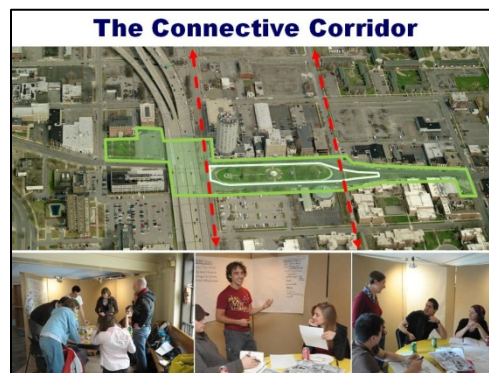
In Syracuse, you could say it begins with the view from University Hill, high above the city. We're only a 15-minute walk from downtown, but for years Interstate-81 has created and

symbolized a divide. To kick-start our role as an anchor institution, we've had to jump that highway, physically and psychologically.



We renovated an old furniture warehouse across town and made it part of our campus. All at once, hundreds of students and their faculty were downtown every single day (and night!). Since then, the Warehouse has become a beautiful home for design, arts journalism, high tech entrepreneurship, and architecture programs, with space for community activities, an art gallery, and a café.

To link the Warehouse and downtown with our campus on the hill, we began collaborating with a wide range of community groups, state and federal agencies, businesses, non-profits, and arts organizations to create a Connective Corridor. This is both a bus route and an arts/business district that runs from the campus to the Warehouse. It links the university with theaters, museums, galleries, shops, restaurants, and parks, and it's still a work in progress.



Hundreds of Syracuse residents have participated in its design, and SU students and faculty have joined a huge range of projects there. To mention just a few, they've designed lighting and landscaping, created one of the nation's largest urban video projects, installed public art in the parks, and helped preserve the history of an important African-American church in the area.



Local businesses and property owners have received grants to improve their façades. Hotels and restaurants have opened, and more people are out on the sidewalks at night.



Just recently, the University opened another major building off the hill, on an old reclaimed brownfield site along the Connective Corridor, this time a LEED-Platinum, state-of-the-art test-bed for our Center of Excellence on Environmental and Energy Systems. The Center is a collaborative experimental facility for research and development in sustainability with participation from twelve academic institutions and numerous firms, from large corporations like Carrier and Siemens to small, entrepreneurial start-ups in Central New York. Here again, as we experienced with the Warehouse, placing a stake in the ground, so to speak, has served as a catalyst for partnerships, in this case promoting sustainable neighborhoods and technology innovation.

Cementing Trust: Pictures that Narrate Lives

The architect Maya Lin once observed: “I see architecture not as a form that contains space, but as an experience, a passage.” With its academic programs and community reach, the university’s infrastructure has been far more than just a real estate investment. It has leveraged the symbolism of “civil infrastructure,” to generate “social infrastructure” between our university and our community.

From the beginning of our presence downtown, right after the opening of the Warehouse, SU architects, artists, designers, and educators began collaborations in neighborhoods and

schools in Syracuse. Several projects focused on bringing SU students, neighborhood residents, and school children together to narrate their lives and their communities through pictures, nurturing trust, empathy, and common cause. Here are some examples, best shown rather than told:



- Julia Czerniak, professor of architecture and director of SU's UPSTATE Center for Design, Research, and Real Estate, asked students in one of her studios to interview and photograph residents in the neighborhood nearest to the Warehouse. This commitment to tell and celebrate the stories of the Near Westside in the words and with the faces of the residents was the beginning of what is now a full-fledged ongoing university-community partnership.



- SU faculty member and photographer Stephen Mahan has been teaching literacy through photography in classes that bring together SU students and students from the city schools to tell their stories through photographs they take themselves. These courses have been transformative, producing published books of photos and poetry, gallery exhibitions, and dialogues about identity, community, immigration, and more.

As these narratives accumulated---often exhibited in the Warehouse---we got new eyes. We looked across West Street, the broad arterial highway that runs beside the Warehouse, and saw an array of empty warehouses and ugly railroad bridges, a physical and social Berlin Wall.



Behind it was the Near Westside, a battered neighborhood with vacant lots, homes, and factories. It was a community with much potential but few supporters. We realized that we couldn't and shouldn't ignore it.

Beyond the Berlin Wall: Syracuse's Near Westside

The Near Westside was once a thriving district of manufacturing, rail yards, and housing, but was hit hard during our city's long industrial decline.¹⁰ Now it is the ninth poorest census tract in the nation. Half of its 3,300 residents live below the poverty level, 40 percent are unemployed, and 17 percent consider themselves to have one or more disabilities. Home ownership here shrank to 15 percent. In 1998 it was devastated by a *derecho*, a storm that might be described as a sideways tornado. It punched in the roof of the high school, tore the steeple off St. Lucy's Church at the heart of the community, and destroyed 80 percent of the neighborhood's trees, giant maples and oaks that caused so much damage as they fell down that many old-timers said they never wanted to plant another tree.

But that didn't stop them in 2006 from joining with us, and with foundations, businesses, not-for-profits, state and city government, other institutions of higher education to create a non-profit organization – the Near Westside Initiative. In fact, residents ranging from the strongly committed priest at St. Lucy's to grandmothers with deep wisdom and memories of the past to the youth who will ultimately save this neighborhood have come together to rebuild and reclaim its legacy.

¹⁰ See David Marc, "Through the Collective work of the Near West Side Initiative, a Once-Neglected Syracuse Neighborhood is Being Revitalized to Fulfill the Vision of the Residents," *Syracuse University Magazine*, Summer 2011.



Ed Bogucz, director of the Center of Excellence, once said he developed a passion for the Initiative because the re-vitalization of the Near Westside---and others like it--- is a “grand challenge.” He said: “If you look at the sustainability of the neighborhood--- its environmental sustainability, the economics, the social justice issues---I think it’s fair to say that this neighborhood and many other neighborhoods in cities across the country were essentially thrown away. And humanity simply can’t throw away neighborhoods and hope to survive on the planet.”¹¹

Instead of setting up a “command and control” model in an office with its own staff, the Initiative adopted a collaborative model, asking participants to meet for consultation and discussion and move toward a common goal. Marilyn Higgins, a former utility company executive who is now vice president of SU’s Community Engagement and Economic Development Office, as well as president of the Initiative’s board of directors, has told me over the years, “It’s really challenging. It’s hard. This hasn’t been done this way before.” As time passed, the very active board of the Initiative did hire a director, Maarten Jacobs to coordinate and oversee its daily progress. Jacobs is a young, committed, and tireless Master of Social Work with a passion for public art.

And to fast forward, before I give some details of their work, consider what those railroad trestles along the Berlin Wall look like today after internationally-known graffiti artist, Steven Powers, was commissioned to spend a month interviewing residents and painting their messages for all to see.



¹¹ Conversation on January 8, 2010.

In the Near Westside, as in all of our collaborations, we seek to create “third spaces” of interaction, where established and often unequal relationships of power and expertise can be shifted to acknowledge what each member of the partnership brings to the table. On the Near Westside, you may have the president of the tenants’ association in public housing arguing over lunch with our dean of architecture or with one of the city’s most powerful attorneys. Each partner brings a different constituency, different experiences. It is this process of talking across difference that makes these partnerships so powerful, with outcomes even better than anyone expected.



Since it was established, this exciting and deeply democratic Initiative has generated close to \$70 million worth of public and private development in the Near Westside. At its epicenter is the Syracuse Art, Literacy, and Technology District – or SALT as it is known. The acronym also recalls our city’s origin as a regional center for the salt trade among Native Americans. The Initiative has been working in the SALT District to embed the arts, technology and design with other fields---architecture, entrepreneurship, law, education, environmental engineering, public health and public communications, to name a few---as catalysts for innovation and transformation. More than 60 artists are already living and working in loft spaces and studios there.



In our residential housing efforts—construction, renovation, financing, and home-buyer education--- Home HeadQuarters, a not-for-profit organization, has been leading the way. They have acquired 103 residential parcels within the target area. They’re building new homes,

rehabilitating others, and selling some derelict houses for \$1 to homeowners who commit to restore them. The Christopher Community and Habitat for Humanity are also deeply involved.¹²



In many ways, our students and faculty have been immersed in the Near Westside as partners, planners, activists, and designers. Marion Wilson, a sculptor and director of community initiatives in the visual arts in our School of Education, has taught a continuing series of classes in which art, design, and architecture students have transformed 601 Tully, a former crack house across the street from an elementary school. Now this is a multi-purpose community incubator for the arts, humanities, and entrepreneurship, complete with its own coffee shop and a community garden.

Three Dividends on the Near Westside of Syracuse

To return for a moment to the dividends CEOs for Cities forecast for investments in metropolitan cores---a green dividend, a talent dividend, and an opportunity dividend---they're all appearing on the Near Westside.

As the Brookings Institution detailed in a path-breaking study released this year, the "green economy" offers more opportunities and better pay for low- and middle-skilled workers than the national economy as a whole.¹³ This "clean" economy now employs 2.7 million workers---more than the fossil fuel industry. Although California ranks first, New York and Texas rank second and third.¹⁴ The promise of renewable energy has ignited a "race to clean" in regions and cities across the United States and around the globe.

In spite of being poor and obscure---and *because* it is eager for renewal---the Near Westside has joined this race in a way the Initiative hopes can be a template for other urban partnerships, as it undertakes cutting edge research, community and economic development,

¹² The Christopher Community has built 60 new affordable rental properties in the Near Westside. Habitat for Humanity has constructed 11 new homes.

¹³ Mark Muro, Jonathan Rothwell, and Davashree Saha with Battelle Technology Partnership Practice, "Sizing the Clean Economy: A National and Regional Green Jobs Assessment," The Brookings Institution Metropolitan Policy Program, 2011, p. 4.

¹⁴ According to this Brookings report, 84 percent of these jobs are in major metropolitan areas, where three-fourths of all the nation's clean economy jobs were created between 2003 and 2010. Nationally, jobs in the clean economy are expanding at an annual rate of 3.4 percent.

teaching, entrepreneurship, and workforce development. We have the advantage that our five-county Central New York region ranks 8th among the nation's 100 largest metropolitan areas in the concentration of private jobs in the clean economy.¹⁵

At the urging of Ed Bogucz, the U.S. Green Building Council designated the Near Westside as the nation's first LEED Neighborhood Development Project. As such, it's committed to compact re-development, with green and mixed-used buildings, pedestrian-friendly streets, public transportation, community policing, neighborhood shops and businesses, and a centralized school and park.

As part of this plan---and no small thing in our climate!---the Initiative is working to make all Near Westside properties more energy-efficient. SU Architecture's UPSTATE Center and the Center of Excellence conducted an international design competition for cutting-edge, green, single-family homes on specific sites in the neighborhood. Starting with the three prize-winners, we've now built 11 green homes. Even in our frigid, snowy winters, one of these homes is so well insulated it can be heated with the energy it would take to run a hair dryer!

The Center has conducted free energy audits for businesses and homes and has helped their owners apply for financing for affordable energy-efficient upgrade. Working with SU and other partners committed to sustainable water management practices, they've introduced cutting edge technologies such as permeable pavements and rain gardens. Before the end of the year, they hope to plant 350 trees.

Issues of sustainability play not just to physical development but also to workforce development, another dividend mentioned by CEOs for Cities. With help from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Initiative has trained 30 men and women in general construction and green infrastructure, and 85 percent of them now have fulltime jobs. We plan to train another 45 people in the next nine months.

The Initiative also wants to reap the opportunity dividend by creating wealth rooted in the community. To this end, two resident-owned cooperatives are being launched: a high-tech hydroponic greenhouse, to grow and sell fresh vegetables, and a green property management company, to maintain the mixed-use properties owned and operated by the Near Westside Initiative, now nearly 300,000 square feet in all.

Two of these properties were large, abandoned warehouses on West Street's "Berlin Wall." SU has led the collaboration to redevelop them. The 100-year-old Lincoln Supply Building has been given a completely green renovation.

¹⁵ Ed Bogucz, Terry Brown, Mike Kelleher, "Clean Energy and Environmental Systems," a White Paper for the Central New York Regional Economic Development Council, Aug. 31, 2011.



It now houses two floors of apartments and two floors of space for offices, including La Casita, a Latino Cultural Center created by SU faculty members in partnership with La Liga, the Spanish Action League. It includes an art gallery, performance space, a bilingual library, a classroom, and a community kitchen.¹⁶ Next door is a small building rehabilitated by the Initiative as a home and studio for the well-known Puerto Rican artist Juan Cruz, who also teaches art there to children from the neighborhood.

The second warehouse, Case Supply, is just starting renovation. It will house the world's largest literacy organization, ProLiteracy International, and WCNY, our regional public television affiliate. Other businesses that have relocated to the neighborhood or started there in the last two years include New York State's oldest architectural firm, a bookstore, a recording studio, a coffee shop, a fitness center, and a bakery. To support the 140 businesses already on the Near Westside, the Initiative has helped organize a business association.

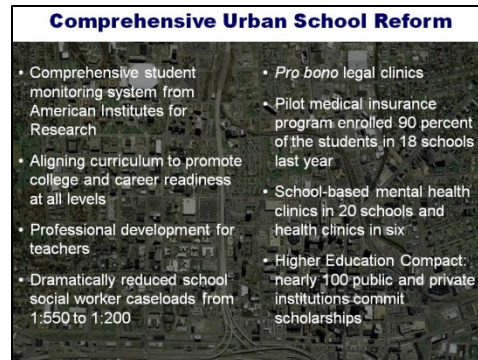
All of these will produce dividends, as CEOs for Cities predicts, but the biggest dividend – the talent dividend – will appear as the children of the Near Westside join the middle class. To make this happen, we have to change the odds that are stacked against them every step of the way. On the Near Westside--- and indeed throughout the entire city of Syracuse---we're doing this through a dramatic and precedent-setting partnership, Say Yes to Education Syracuse.

Changing the Odds for Children



¹⁶ Melinda Johnson, "La Casita, A Latino Cultural Center, Comes to Fruition on Near West Side," *The Post Standard*, 25 Sept. 2011, C1.

SU has joined the Syracuse City School District, the Syracuse Teachers Association, the city, the county, and the American Institutes for Research in this collaboration with the Say Yes to Education Foundation. Say Yes has taken its model to other cities, but Syracuse is the first place they're scaling up to the level of an entire school district: 21,000 students.



Say Yes Syracuse provides a comprehensive system of academic, socio-emotional, health, and legal supports for all Syracuse public school students and their families. It also guarantees that any qualified graduate of a city public high school can get the money to attend college. Two dozen private institutions, including SU, and the entire SUNY and CUNY systems, have entered a compact to participate. At this point, Say Yes has sent approximately 1000 students to 60 different colleges.

From the very first, we want children to know they can go to college. The Dr. Martin Luther King Elementary School near our campus has renamed itself Dr. King University, DKU. The teachers wear their college sweatshirts, and they even call the cafeteria the “dining hall.” Elmwood Elementary School calls its first graders by their college graduation year, the Class of 2027. Kindergartners are the Class of 2028.

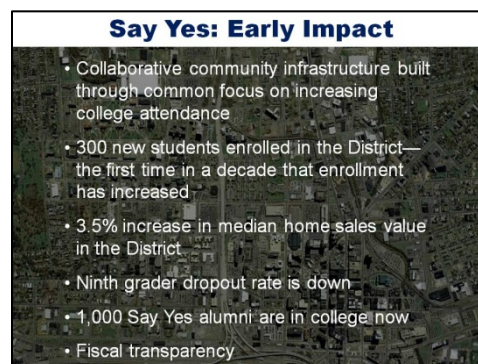
Hope is essential. So is information. We’ve conducted a parents’ university at SU with workshops on topics such as how to talk with your child’s teacher or how immigrant families can negotiate the culture of American schools. We’ve also conducted eighth grade universities at SU to give middle school students a taste of college classes for a day and to familiarize their teachers with new majors such as Transmedia studies and admissions requirements their students will need to know well in advance to enter fields such as architecture, where applicants must present a portfolio. To keep the flow of information going, 65 graduate students will be hired as academic coaches in all our high schools, and the four largest high schools have an Access to College coordinator. We are running an Early College High School with from 75-115 students (balanced on race/ethnicity, ESL, and inclusion) in one high school, with support from the Woodrow Wilson Foundation. This includes an integrated academic program that allows students to earn one to two years of transferable college credits to promote high school graduation and college completion.

Across the district, Say Yes is building in all kinds of supports, both academic and social, including 354 trained tutors (and role models), who are college students paid through work study, and another 130 SU student volunteers, a number that keeps growing. Twenty elementary schools have a Say Yes site director to make programs run smoothly during and after the school

day. Helping all our public school students succeed requires that we also address the issues that affect their lives after hours, their physical and mental health and the well-being of their families. It also means providing the extra enrichment—and experiences—that suburban families may well take for granted.

Working with community-based organizations, Say Yes is running free after school programs for all the city's elementary schools and a free summer camp for kids 5 to 10 years old. Last summer, 2,100 city children went to camp. We've dramatically reduced the caseloads for school social workers, and we've changed their job descriptions to include flexible work hours and regular home visits.

In four schools and three community locations, we're running free legal clinics where lawyers give families *pro bono* advice, service, and referrals in such areas as housing, immigration, and debtor rights. We're working to ensure that the children take advantage of available medical insurance programs, enrolling 90 percent of the students in 18 schools. We are setting up mental health clinics in 20 elementary schools and have established health clinics in six of them.



Because we know that the prosperity of our city is at stake, we're very encouraged by the early indicators of the sweeping impact of Say Yes. We've seen enrollment in the city schools increase for the first time in a decade—by 300 this fall¹⁷—which tells us that parents are choosing to move or keep their children in city schools. We've seen median home sales values increase by 3.5%, even with a persistently sluggish real estate market. And we've already seen the drop-out rate for 9th graders fall over the past two years.

These early signs of progress are, we believe, a bellwether of the more transformative influence yet to come, as all of the educational and family supports take root and the community begins to really believe that all of our City children can thrive on a path toward post-secondary education.

I'm delighted that 127 Say Yes scholars are now attending SU. This is an important result and benefit of the relationships we've created with our community. The seamless two-way

¹⁷ R. Bifulco and R. Rubenstein, *The Effect of the Syracuse Say Yes City-wide Turnaround Strategy on Public School Enrollments: A Report on Initial Trends*. (Syracuse, NY: Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University, 2011).

street we're pursuing promotes far more authentic understanding of the knowledge and the human talent that are in our midst but often unappreciated.

The Two-Way Street Back to Campus

As an anchor institution, we aim to transform our region. In the process, we know that we ourselves are being transformed, both in the composition of our academic community and in how we do our work. Susan Sturm refers to this full agenda as one of “institutional citizenship,” and it affords universities, whether public like Texas or private like Syracuse, the best chance to succeed in educating the full spectrum of the next generation.



This agenda includes our stance on recruiting and retaining students and faculty. Unlike some of our peer institutions, SU takes no pride in how many applicants we turn away. Instead, we're looking expansively for talent, using the new eyes and understandings that Scholarship in Action has given us.

Syracuse enrolls more than 12,000 undergrads, and this fall our enrollment of first-year students of color is at an all-time high of 32 percent—nearly double what it was 10 years ago. More than a quarter of our undergraduates qualify for federal Pell grants, far more than most private research universities. And 15 percent of our first-year students are the first-generation in their families to go to college.

Building pathways for recruitment requires knocking down our invisible walls and constructing geographies of opportunity for students and their families long before it's time for them to apply to college. This means reaching out across our region, for example, partnering with our neighbors from the indigenous Onondaga Nation, and indeed with all six sovereign Haudenosaunee Nations. Our Haudenosaunee Promise guarantees full financial support up front for any citizen of the six Nations, so that children and families can form the expectation of going to college early on.

Our geographies of opportunity are increasingly encompassing partnerships with community colleges across the country, starting at home with an extensive 2+2 dual enrollment program with Onondaga Community College in Syracuse and extending to Georgia Perimeter in Atlanta, Miami-Dade in Florida, DeAnza Community College in California and beyond. As part

of these partnerships, we emphasize the financial and social support available to transfer students, with a dedicated financial aid professional supported by a grant from the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation, and a set of student affairs professionals ready to ease the transition to Syracuse.

As we reach out to a broader, more diverse pool of students (and faculty), it turns out that having expansive partnerships in our own multi-cultural, multi-lingual city plays a key role in ensuring that our talented recruits succeed once they arrive. As John Saltmarsh and other scholars have noted, opportunities to feel connected to and engaged with under-served communities are predictors of both student and faculty retention, and that's just what we're seeing. In architecture, a field that has not traditionally been inclusive, the dean reports a substantial increase in students of color.¹⁸ He attributes this to intense recruitment in metropolitan areas with diverse populations and to the attraction of being able to engage at Syracuse in architecture studios like those on the Near Westside. And, the same can be said for faculty who now come to SU at least in part for its commitment to publicly-engaged scholarship. For example, the dean of education reports that Say Yes and related programs have been significant factors in recruiting and retaining faculty of color.¹⁹

Whether it's sustainable architecture or inclusive education, public scholarship gives both students and faculty chances to maintain ties to communities and projects that validate their "place" in the university. Word is quickly spreading across campus. Our Spanish department has asked Say Yes to help arrange for their students to tutor in bilingual elementary schools. The physics and biology departments and the College of Engineering and Computer Science have also approached Say Yes and the National Science Foundation about projects that would both create strong STEM pipelines to college and directly engage our current students and faculty in making a difference in our community.

Lighting up the Community with Possibility

As an anchor institution, our goal is not only to transform our community and our campus, but also to create active citizens and public scholars in ways that cultivate democratic values and interactions. For as the social theorist/activist, Harry Boyte, observed recently, "We need scholarship which not only analyzes and criticizes but also stimulates conversations, expands the sense of the possible and activates civic energies."²⁰

¹⁸ Among architecture students, 30 percent are students of color, with 16 percent Latino and African American.

¹⁹ Faculty of color make up 59 percent of the assistant professors in education.

²⁰ Harry Boyte, American Commonwealth Project short description, August 25, 2011. The American Commonwealth Project (ACP) is an initiative by a group of higher education and civic leaders in dialogue with the U.S. Department of Education and the White House Office of Public Engagement, growing from efforts across higher education to reclaim its public purposes. Boyte is Director of the Center for Democracy and Citizenship at Augsburg College and a Senior Fellow at the Humphrey School of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota.



This is what we're doing in Syracuse, as you can see in this image from the Near Westside Initiative holiday party in front of the newly renovated Lincoln Supply Warehouse. More than 100 teenagers crossed West Street that day, and, as Marilyn Higgins observed, "You could almost see them believing this is something possible for them." And although we'll never match the sunshine of Texas, we do join you in wanting to light up the possibilities for students like these who represent our best future.