

Comm-University Speech

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Naropa University

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Ladies and gentleman, I would like for you to think with me this morning on a concept that's been lingering in my mind for over year. This concept deals with the future of our universities and their respective relationship with the surrounding community. If we ponder on the functions that a university plays in our society and then consider those functions in the larger context of our community, what do we see?

This very question has led me to the resounding conclusion that the university and the community are in a symbiotic relationship. Just as much as the university influences the surrounding community, the surrounding community is of paramount importance to the university. For example, in our own community, the University of Colorado at Boulder (CU Boulder) plays a pivotal role in the life and vibrancy of Boulder. With it's over 30,000 students, coming from every conceivable corner of our country and our world, CU Boulder brings to its surrounding community economic, political and cultural capital.

The students, professors and supporting university staff are critical to the life-blood of the Boulder economy. Happenings and decisions made at the University, be it a choice construct a new facility or a Buffs victory carry palpable political and social implications in the wider community. The sheer diversity of thought and body, which comprise CU Boulder, are an asset to Boulder community whose dividends are impossible to compute, but are certainly enormous.

As a note worthy antidote, consider the front page of our local paper, The Daily Camera, and how frequently it features news related to CU. By my count, its more 2/3 of the days in a year.

Now, think of the residents and governing institutions that comprise the larger Boulder community and the relevance they hold to CU. The Boulder City Council votes on ordinances give govern everything from the height of buildings to noise laws. Local business in our community, be it on the Pearl Street or the 29th Street Mall, provide indispensable services to CU. Public services from police, fire to the sanitation department ensure the stability and safety of the University 365 days a year.

There is deep relationship here in Boulder that is entirely un-unique. Across the country, there are universities and community which share a bond; a connection that is beyond economic, political or cultural; it is a shared purpose.

Benjamin Franklin, one of the Founding Fathers of our great country and the founder of the University of Pennsylvania, once said, "the destiny of a true university is inextricably tied to the well-being of the people it serves, and as such these people are the local community."

But our journey today is not about pondering what currently exists but is seldom talked

about. It is about envisioning the future. A future in which the relationship between the university and its community is deepened, enhanced and made conscious.

I would like to talk and work with you on building something that I call a Comm-University.

Before we can build this Comm-University, we must first consider what it means to be apart of a university.

There is of course the Ivory Tower of academia – that beautiful, large edifice of prestige, history and knowledge which is filled with books and portraits of famous alumnus.

To me, this classic edifice fuels the mentality that the University is a separate place from all of the rest of society. It is unlike the local library or school, it is that special place that you enter only upon admission and exit only upon decree (or degree). Once there you are infused with the very knowledge, prestige and purpose held by those who are now famous portraits on the wall. And when you leave, you carry a degree. One which denotes to the broader community and world that you are certified and blessed by this very special, separate place of importance.

Seemingly un-related, let's consider what it means to be part of a community?

As member of a community, you are part of a society. You are raised in a neighborhood. You are familiar with your surroundings. You play sports at the local community center. You walk the mall of the local main street. You go enjoy the classic moments life at the local coffee shops, restaurants and bars with your friends and families. You enjoy the local nature.

This community, which houses you, is an extension of your home. It is where you were raised. It is where you went to school. It is what you know.

Why are these two things separate and how can we bring them together? These are the questions that ungrid the foundation of a Comm-University.

The redundancies between what a community offers and university needs is what I call 'the tragedy of the lack of commons.' Universities have their prestigious libraries housed with tens of thousands of books, but communities have their own separate public libraries – why? Communities have fully staff and equipped hospitals and medical facilities and so do universities – why? Universities have speculator stadiums for the prized sports teams and local public schools have lesser yet similarly purposed facilities – why? This list of examples extends to recreational facilities, gyms, performing arts centers, musical halls, etc.

Is this sustainable and is this what is best for everyone? Building two of so many things costs tens of millions of dollars and millions more to maintain. This is a very good time to ask this question as all universities and government budgets are having to make steep cuts.

For statistical proof, we should look at the facts. In 2011, 48 out of 50 states are implementing major cuts beginning with basic public services, such a libraries and community centers. Similarly, universities, across America have to make tough decisions about staff,

facilities and educational services because of budget limitations. Raising tuition, as has been done for every year at a rate five times inflations, won't make ends meet anymore.

Now, let's consider what a university and community might look like if spaces – recreational, academic and social – were built with a shared purpose and identity in mind. Members of the community and student of university could use the libraries alike. Students and athletes could use gym and recreational along side the entire community. Dollars would be spent in a way which maximizes efficiency and collective benefit.

But more than buildings, we've talked about the shared, intangible and inescapable relationship between the university and the community. As such, cultivating a shared identity where the residents of the local community feel apart of the local university and vis-versa is paramount. Economically this could meet having locally owned businesses being placed on the ground floors of dormitories or community farmers markets taking places through campus. Socially this could entail having regular musical and theatrical performances put on by university students for all to enjoy at the local community arts center. Building this shared identity is about bring everyone to the table as steak-holders.

The implications of this shared dynamic are impressive. With shared spaces you cut economic costs as well as build a green economy, which uses less carbon and produces less waste. Further, the connection that is established among students and community members is critical for fomenting citizenship and collective responsibility. Such integration marks the next iteration of getting to know one's neighbors. The Comm-University holds great promise for a better type of civilly, democratic enterprise.

The mission of the Comm-University is to serve students and the community through a collaborative education, innovation, and synergistic living and cultivated shared responsibility and partnership. Thus, the final question is how can we build this now and together?

To put is another way, if you as members of this audiences, were all apart of a committee entrusted to build the Comm-University, how would you do it and what would it look like?

Thank you, happy building!