

## President's Council on Boston University and the Global Future

### **Recommendations of the Sub-Committee on Global Research**

(revised August 29, 2006)

The following recommendations are aimed at expanding, coordinating, and advancing research at Boston University on issues of global importance. These issues are often difficult to address comprehensively within the bounds of specialized disciplines because they are pervasive, complicated as well as regional, national, and international in their scope. We recommend that Boston University establish a Global Institute to support research and teaching creatively and in ways that are unconventional and unprecedented among major research Universities. The vision is that Boston University will continue to develop as a major center of knowledge creation on global issues of unparalleled importance, and that, through our research, education and service activities, we will set new standards for innovative collaboration.

- **Invest in and develop Boston University as the leading center for education, service and knowledge creation on issues that are characterized by their global importance.**

With careful investments that are aligned with a clear vision about the global future, Boston University can distinguish itself among major universities as a center for education, service and knowledge creation on issues that are uniquely characterized by their global relevance. Many universities that have been historical leaders in this area are constrained from future leadership because the most salient issues of global importance today span the boundaries created by the traditional disciplines, which necessitates broad but deep academic strengths. Our recommendation is that Boston University marshal, organize and integrate insights from rigorous disciplinary research into new knowledge on issues that are both interdisciplinary and global in their significance.

Issues of global importance are ideas, themes, and concerns that can (a) only be fully understood with the integration of rigorous knowledge from more than one discipline, (b) affect people in diverse countries and regions of the world, and (c) lead to opportunities for action by government policy-makers, institutional leaders and the public at large. Examples include climate change, biodiversity, emerging infectious disease, urbanization, economic globalization, and cultural conflicts. In its deliberations, the Council did not seek to develop a comprehensive list of global issues, but rather focused on their implications and the opportunity for Boston University to contribute new knowledge on these issues.

The challenge to Boston University to distinguish itself among the many educational institutions working on global issues is a reflection of their complexity and the need

to develop disciplinary bridging mechanisms. Almost all issues of global importance can yield critical new knowledge only through the integration of perspectives that emerge from the life sciences, physical sciences, humanities, social sciences, and professional schools. Historically, almost all universities that have led in the basic disciplines that yield crucial elements of knowledge on these topics have also developed organizational boundaries, administrative constraints, and procedural barriers that prevent the integration of knowledge into applicable new insights. Boston University has the opportunity to become a center for the generation of new insight precisely because there is a widespread commitment across our campuses to cross these boundaries and break these constraints.

Boston University has many strengths, resources and assets that equip us to integrate knowledge from the root disciplines on issues of global significance. Just a few examples include our international teaching programs, our area studies programs, and our disciplinary diversity and expertise. The alignment of educational, service and research programs on globally significant issues is integral to the generation of actionable knowledge. By coordinating our activities on global issues, and by investing in deliberative, focused programs that include and link teaching and service with integrative research, Boston University can capitalize on the combined strength of already established activities. Consequently, the Council's recommendations are:

- **Establish a new Global Institute dedicated to knowledge creation, education, dissemination and service on issues of global importance.**

A centerpiece of our recommendations is that Boston University establishes a Global Institute dedicated to the generation of new knowledge and insights on global issues, especially those that cannot be addressed comprehensively within individual departments, area-studies programs, schools, and colleges of the University. Through its research activities, the Global Institute will invest in an accumulating body of distinctive knowledge on questions that are of central interest to students, the scholarly community, policy-makers, institutional leaders, and the public.

The Institute's research mission would be to:

- Create new interdisciplinary research programs that address global issues of highest concern that will attract funding from funding agencies, foundations and individual donors.
- Conduct essential analytical studies in order to develop a body of new insights on the selected urgent global themes
- Capitalize on the established strengths of the university and our students, faculty, and city by supporting disciplinary and interdisciplinary research on global themes.
- Promote the development of cross-disciplinary research working groups by

linking research faculty with the curriculum development component within the Institute through the sponsorship of conferences, workshops, internal and invited lectureships and other mechanisms to better connect faculty from different parts of the University and from both campuses;

- Encourage hiring and retention of scholars with a global perspective;

A central activity of the Global Institute in fulfilling this mission would be the annual distribution of a series of seed grants to scholars at Boston University who are pursuing funding for research aligned with one of a small number of major themes that will be identified by the Institute's Board. The operations of the Global Institute would involve:

- The President and Provost would constitute a small faculty team, with its membership drawn from the entire university, as the Institute's Research Board, with members holding staggered three-year terms;
- The university would provide initial funds on a substantial but economical scale to be disbursed as research seed grants to University scholars;
- The Board would select a limited number of global themes for each round of research grants (e.g, climate change, pandemic infectious disease and cultural change), so as to build up a broad based portfolio of pilot projects;
- The Research Board would also be charged with responsibility for reviewing research proposals submitted by Boston University faculty for research funds on one of the selected themes;
- Each research proposal would be scored on a number of criteria, including the connections anticipated by the researcher for incorporating and connecting to curricular and service activities, and the identification of potential long term funding agencies for ongoing research support;
- The criteria for evaluating proposals would include its relevance to activities around the University, the applicant's prior research productivity, and the anticipated public impact
- The Institute would network scholars across Boston University who apply for and/or receive seed grants on particular topics;
- The Institute would hold annual conferences to disseminate insights to the broader constituency of the University, including the public, institutional leaders, and scholars

A major goal of a Global Institute at Boston University would be to provide a vision and the energy to surmount existing structural and functional barriers that exist between departments and colleges and between the Medical and Charles River campuses. As a model for collaboration that is connected to and arising from the academic mission of the University, the Institute will indirectly affect all research conducted at Boston University. Without doubt the research activities of the Global Institute should be closely integrated with the curricular initiatives of Institute, as more fully described in the report by the Curriculum Sub-committee.

- **Improve conditions for scholarly exchange and visiting international scholars and graduate students**

Boston University is distinctive in the large number of international students it attracts to the Boston campus, and also in promoting scholarly visits by students from our Boston campuses to international locations.

To support these initiatives, we recommend that the following actions be taken:

- Increase funding to provide tuition waivers to international students with fellowships from distinguished programs (e.g., Fulbright) who are judged by BU's schools and departments to be strong graduate candidates;
- Raise to a top priority the recruitment of international students with research potential to Boston University's undergraduate and graduate programs. Establish consistent rules and procedures for the allocation of tuition funds from GRASP funds, etc. While a number of international organizations and countries provide scholarships for study and research abroad, and the US is a popular destination for higher education, many of the international merit-based scholarships offer only partial tuition, or no tuition assistance at all.
- Increase the efforts already ongoing to recruit and support a more diverse and representative international Visitors/Scholars Program. We propose that designated funds be set aside to support visits to the Charles River and Medical campuses by international scholars who have the potential to advance our common research and scholarship.

- **Establish a comprehensive plan to facilitate the funding of international research collaboration.**

There are recent federal initiatives to enable U.S. institutions to establish collaborative relationships with international groups or institutions, to facilitate greater student preparation for and participation in international research collaboration, and to contribute to the development of a diverse, globally-engaged, U.S. science and engineering workforce. Boston University has not invested to develop capabilities in several important areas related to international research. In addition, the dispersion of research activities across our schools and colleges has created centers of capability in various parts of the University which now have little knowledge of one another. We recommend that Boston University study our existing capabilities in order to establish more carefully and rationally new areas of capability:

- Identify in a more timely manner deadlines for external funding and for internal grant competition (i.e. the Integrative Graduate Education and Research

Traineeship (IGERT) program). Many funding opportunities permit a limited number of submissions per institution, sometimes just one. These include international partnership programs and training grants for graduate students. Often the announcements can be anticipated well in advance but are officially made only a short time before the deadline. We recommend that Boston University establish a comprehensive plan for identifying both discipline-specific and cross-disciplinary funding opportunities for external funding and set timely deadlines and guidelines for internal grant competition, grant preparation and evaluation.

- Better coordinate the Office of Sponsored Programs, the Development Office, and the Provost's Office of both campuses with respect to dissemination of information about upcoming funding opportunities. Improving communication between the two campuses will facilitate cooperation between Boston University departments and units applying for grants on similar topics. The problem of coordination, lack of clear lines of responsibility, and sufficient staffing has fostered isolated episodes of conflict and led to wasted collaborative funding opportunities.
- The Committee recommends that the CRC and MED campus Provost's Offices work to improve communication and coordination between these three units. It should review each unit's mission, objectives and capabilities; clarify ambiguous areas; and correct overlaps and conflicts. It should routinely facilitate the exchange of information among academic units across the University, identify synergies across international research teams, and encourage opportunities for coordinating joint funding applications.

- **Expand funding to facilitate international travel for faculty and graduate students to make presentations at international meetings.**

One of the most subtle, basic and important opportunities for improving Boston University's interaction with the global community is in the participation by our faculty and graduate students in important international conferences. However, the budgets in most units of the University are meager and unfocused. The Committee recommends the allocation of resources to a new University-wide fund to support international research travel. Funding for travel should be comparable to that of Boston University's peer institutions and should serve as a stimulus for global research. Applications should be reviewed competitively on criteria that reflect the implications of the travel for the University's reputation as well as for the benefits to faculty and graduate student research.

- **Disseminate information to BU faculty and the public about BU's international initiatives and resources**

The dissemination of information about global initiatives at BU and about opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration is so irregular, at present that faculty

and students routinely learn about those initiatives by chance and/or after the fact. This leads to reduplicative effort and wasted opportunities. Thus, we recommend that Boston University:

- Produce a web-based “Resource Guide” that highlights the breadth of existing international research programs and activities at Boston University, as well as emerging opportunities. Because international research at Boston University is diverse and complex, it often involves teams of researchers in different schools and colleges. A searchable web-based “Resource Guide” would be an invaluable tool for faculty, graduate students, and other researchers to better identify others who share areas of common interest, funding opportunities, establishing MOU’s, etc.
  
- Establish a searchable, web-based university-wide database that would identify grants awarded to Boston University faculty and major equipment and or other resources that could be shared with others. As Boston University's research enterprise is rapidly growing, there is an increasing need for networking the resources within the university. We also recommend the establishment of a relational and searchable database of grants and research activities that can guide scholars to international programs, laboratories, equipment, and other research resources on our campuses.