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Lifelong Learning and Educational Reform

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Abstract — The concept of “lifelong learning” is increasingly heard in discussions of higher education reform in the United States. Lifelong learning is central to many significant reforms taking place at Portland State University (PSU). The term is found, for example, in the mission statement of University Studies, PSU’s new general education program, as well as in the mission statement of PSU’s School of Extended Studies. This paper explores the various meanings of lifelong learning evident in the educational reforms taking place at PSU. Three distinct constructs of lifelong learning are identified and contrasted: students as lifelong learners; lifelong learning as a curriculum goal; and lifelong learning as a vehicle for program development and outreach.

Each of these constructs is related to different aspects of institutional reform at PSU. This article uses these constructs as lenses offering distinct but partially overlapping views and understandings of the reforms taking place in the university. Each lens reveals a different aspect of how lifelong learning at PSU is shaping an emerging model of the urban university. The process of PSU’s institutional transformation is closely linked to the impact of these three aspects of lifelong learning on the structure and functioning of the university.

INTRODUCTION

Like the old adage about virtue, it could be said of lifelong learning that everyone seems to be in favor of it, though no one is exactly sure what it is. One observer has remarked that lifelong learning

has become a policy icon of the 1990s. Across the world, governments and gurus sing its praises. It will - so we are told - help career development, tackle unemployment, encourage flexibility and change, raise ‘personal and national competitiveness’, help us become ‘complete human beings’,... (Holford 1996).

Lifelong learners are moving from the margins to the mainstream of educational policy. Consider, for example, that 1996 was the “European Year of Lifelong Learning”. In the United States, the topic of lifelong learning is increasingly heard in discussions of educational needs, standards, policies and reforms for both K-12 and postsecondary levels. Lifelong learning has been adopted by the U.S. Congress as part of a national educational goal (National Educational Goals Panel 1996; Riley 1993). In response, the U.S. Department of Education has established the National Institute on Postsecondary Education, Libraries and Lifelong Learning with a mission “to advance knowledge about the training of adults in a variety of contexts to better provide them with the knowledge and skills to compete in a

global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship” (Humes 1996: iii). It is of more than purely bureaucratic interest that lifelong learning and postsecondary education are seen as related in this reorganization of the Department of Education’s research arm. In Australia, policymakers are also seeing close linkages between lifelong learning and undergraduate education; the Australian National Board of Employment, Education and Training has recently completed a major commissioned study, *Developing lifelong learners through undergraduate education* (Candy, Crebert & O’Leary 1994).

Defining Lifelong Learning

Generally, lifelong learning is seen as a process by which individuals continue to develop their knowledge, abilities and interests throughout their lifetimes. The capacity for lifelong learning is thought to result from the acquisition of specific sets of skills and dispositions towards learning. The relationship between formal education and lifelong learning, however, is less certain. One common view of the relationship is that lifelong learning is distinct from formal education, perhaps concurrent with it at times, but primarily something which takes place after the end of formal education. As an example, consider Humes’ summary from a scholarly conference on lifelong learning: “The phrase ‘lifelong learning’ recognizes that individuals learn over the course of their lifetimes and in a multitude of contexts; they learn parallel to their formal schooling and they continue to learn after their formal schooling is completed” (1996: 7).

The concept of “lifelong learning” partially overlaps with several others, including “lifelong education”, “recurrent education” and “education permanente”. Before considering the context of lifelong learning at Portland State, it therefore behooves us to differentiate the term from these other, partially overlapping ones. Whereas lifelong learning includes a rich array of formal and informal, institutionally-directed and self-directed learning activities across the lifespan, the other terms refer more narrowly to particular institutionalized forms of education. The most general of these, *lifelong education*, is a framework developed by UNESCO’s International Commission on the Development of Education in 1971. Considered a visionary proposal at the time of its inception, the lifelong education framework was intended to serve as a “master concept for educational policies” underlying the provision of all levels and types of education for all learners throughout both the developed and developing world (Faure 1972). Five key precepts are at the core of UNESCO’s vision of lifelong education:

- it encompasses the entire lifespan
- results in the continual acquisition, renewal, and upgrading of the skills, knowledge and attitudes necessitated by changing conditions in the world
- promotes the ultimate goal of individual self-fulfillment
- depends on individuals’ increasing ability and motivation to participate in self-directed learning activities
- recognizes and build on all available educational influences: formal, non-formal, and informal (Cropley 1979)

Lifelong education in turn subsumes the more specialized concepts of recurrent education and education permanente. Whereas lifelong education focuses on lifelong learning in response to the changing conditions in which people live, *recurrent education* refers primarily to forms of continued learning stimulated specifically by economic or technological change, and *education permanente* refers primarily to continued learning in response to changes that are primarily social and cultural in nature (Candy et al. 1994). These two partially overlapping forms of lifelong education were promulgated by different international bodies in response to UNESCO’s lifelong education framework. Recurrent education was widely adopted by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development as a lifelong learning-based strategy to link economic and educational development (OECD 1973), while recurrent education was championed by the Council of Europe as an institutional strategy to promote lifelong learning (Jessup 1973).

The U.S. Experience with Lifelong Learning

The enthusiasm among these international bodies for using lifelong learning as an educational model has never been matched in the United States. Although the concept of lifelong learning developed relatively early in American educational thought, it has yet to be well understood or broadly implemented. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, in its landmark study of the “Mission of the College Curriculum”, identified “lifelong learning” -- further defined as a “love of learning” and “sustained intellectual interests” -- among its top ten cognitive goals for individual students (Bowen 1977). Cogent arguments for the necessity of lifelong learning in American society have been advanced for some time by scholars (e.g., Cross 1987). Comprehensive surveys of adults in the United States indicate that a very large and rapidly increasing number are, in fact, engaged in lifelong learning activities. A recent national household survey of adults age 16 and above (excluding those in high school or enrolled full-time in postsecondary credential programs) found that during 1995, 40% of adults participated in formally structured educational activities; the corresponding figure from a parallel survey in 1991 was 32%. During 1995, about half of the participants (21%) took work-related courses, 20% personal development courses, and 6% courses related to a diploma, degree or certificate program.

Despite these trends and other evidence of increasing demand for lifelong learning (e.g., increasing corporate investments in workforce training; attempts to create “learning organizations” in workplaces), calls for new educational forms to promote lifelong learning in the United States have not generally led to major institutional reforms. This contrasts with the experience of Europe, where there has been relatively broad acceptance of the need to make lifelong learning more systematic from a public policy perspective; numerous European countries, for example, have developed national policies on lifelong learning, including Britain, Germany, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. The relative lack of policy focus in the United States on lifelong learning may seem somewhat surprising, given the volume of basic research on adult development and learning. Relatively little has been done in the United States, unfortunately, to synthesize the needed research from a lifelong learning perspective, unlike in Europe, Australia, Japan and many developing countries (e.g., Candy et al. 1994; Knapper & Cropley 1991). With some notable exceptions, such as Delaware, few states have included either lifelong learning or lifelong education frameworks in their strategic educational planning. Most local and state policies seem barely aware of the concept, and those that are tend to treat it as learning narrowly focused on the workplace, rather than as a vital element of mainstream curricula and programs.

A combination of economic, technological and demographic changes will continue to increase the demands on undergraduate education to foster lifelong learning skills and attitudes. A number of factors seem to be driving the need for undergraduate institutions to restructure their programs to better meet the needs of lifelong learners:

- the growing proportions of nontraditional higher education students
- demographic changes (particularly aging) in the population and workforce
- the expanding number of adults in the workforce enrolling in training and education courses
- technological and structural changes in workplaces, including the emergence of high performance organizations
- the increasing amount of information needed for effective functioning in society
- the diminishing longevity of technical and professional knowledge

Portland State University -- like many other urban universities in the United States -- is responding to these pressures, trying to forge programs which better meet the needs of lifelong learners in its metropolitan environment. The university's evolving urban mission is increasingly seen as distinct from those of other traditional types of universities (Reardon & Lohr *this issue*). Although few of its reforms may appear directly related to lifelong learning, a closer analysis reveals that many of the innovations underway can be understood as responses to needs for incorporating lifelong learning into the fundamental structure and functioning of the institution. The remainder of this paper will explore the various meanings of lifelong learning evident in the reforms of PSU, and how each meaning of lifelong learning is situated in the emerging transformation of the university.

MULTIPLE MEANINGS OF LIFELONG LEARNING AT PORTLAND STATE

There are multiple meanings or senses of lifelong learning evident in the evolving structure and functioning of PSU as an urban university. Three of these meanings will be explored here: *Students as lifelong learners*; *lifelong learning as a curriculum goal*; and *lifelong learning as a vehicle for program development and outreach*. Each of these meanings or senses of lifelong learning at PSU is described in turn, along with the way in which it has influenced the ongoing transformation of the university.

Students as Lifelong Learners

Portland State's students can certainly be considered lifelong learners in demographic terms. They are predominantly nontraditional college students, being considerably older than traditional college students and bringing to campus their diverse attachments to and experiences in family, work and community roles in the urban environment. According to various surveys, reports and tabulations made by PSU's Office of Institutional Research, nearly half (46%) of Portland State's undergraduates are over 25 years old, a standard benchmark for identifying nontraditional students. The preponderance (82%) of the students also work either part-time or full-time. Much student employment does not reflect the employment patterns of the traditional student, who tended to work only as a means of financing their education. Many of PSU's students have established fields of work and are simultaneously employed and studying in that same field. Three-quarters (75%) of recent graduates are employed in a job directly related to their undergraduate studies.

These nontraditional students thus imbue Portland State with one very clear meaning of lifelong learning. Their demographic characteristics, the shapes of their educational careers, and the richness of the adult roles and experiences they bring to campus life all contribute to a strong institutional sense of lifelong learning. These lifelong learners engage and help shape many of PSU's programs, whether participating as returning, continuing, or non-credit students. Additional research about nontraditional PSU students subsequent participation in both self-directed and formally organized educational activities will help clarify the relationship between nontraditional students and lifelong learners.

Portland State, like an increasing number of universities, is responding programmatically to the influx of these nontraditional students and lifelong learners. In response to their special needs and characteristics, PSU is increasingly offering courses at varying times of the day and week, at varying locations and with varying delivery technologies to accommodate the schedules, locations and other major time commitments of nontraditional students (e.g., to work and family). This is the case not only for the non-credit and continuing education courses that historically have been designed for students in the workforce, but also increasingly for delivering core components of the reformed undergraduate curriculum (see below).

It is becoming clear, as PSU transforms to better meet the needs of nontraditional students, that additional types of reforms will be needed to support the lifelong learning processes and activities of nontraditional students. The personal problems and life circumstances that typically interfere with students' academic success differ between young adults entering university directly after high school and older

students having simultaneous jobs, family obligations, financial problems and other impediments known to place undergraduates at risk of academic failure (Berkner, Cuccaro-Alamin, McCormick & Bobbitt 1996). The difficulties posed by the many competing priorities and obligations of nontraditional students are exacerbated in urban settings such as Portland by their tendency to commute to school from homes and jobs rather than to reside on campus. Nearly all (90%) of Portland State's students commute to school. Together, the patterns of competing priorities and commuting are creating strong demand for programs to find new ways to foster active student involvement in learning, which a growing body of research indicates is essential to undergraduate success (Kuh, Schuh, White & Associates 1991; Pascarella & Terenzini 1991).

Towards this end, scholarly focus and conversations on campus are attending to questions of how best to restructure student services at PSU to better meet the needs of nontraditional students, whose needs for orientation, assessment, financial support, personal counseling and academic advising services are distinct and often broader than those of the traditional students for whom the services originally were designed. Although with few exceptions, the transformation of student services is still in the discussion and planning stage, some of the necessary changes are coming into view. New models being considered reorganize and closely link the delivery of academic programs and student services. In one model being considered, traditional distinctions between the provision of academic and student services would become blurred within their umbrella organization, PSU's Office of Academic Affairs (OAA). Services provided to traditional and nontraditional students alike would become much more closely tied to the needs of lifelong learning. Training and support for the development and application of a wide range of skills and knowledge would be increasingly coordinated between academic offerings and student services. Perhaps in the future, students encountering needs for assistance with the use of technology or with identifying and accessing community resources for a class research project might be able to access needed support and training through offerings of the Center for Academic Excellence, a unit of OAA. Center staff and instructional faculty would more closely collaborate to plan effective ways to cross-train and engage key skills, ones that become increasingly applicable to an expanding range of academic courses as well as to formal and informal lifelong learning activities after students leave the university.

The Center for Academic Excellence is already evolving within OAA to support successful faculty engagement in ongoing institutional changes by providing support services for faculty (Davidson *this issue*). The future restructuring of academic and student services holds the promise of pro-

viding more efficient and effective support of students' lifelong learning through improved assessment, community-based service learning and basic skills support for diverse nontraditional and traditional undergraduates. Some programmatic pieces are being tried that likely will provide the needed in-house experience and expertise to guide the development of the larger reforms needed (e.g., community-based writing programs for University Studies students needing improved basic writing skills; the ongoing attempts of a campus wide "assessment team" to develop improved student assessment methodology that are more closely aligned with institutional reforms).

Lifelong Learning as a Curriculum Goal

A second important meaning of lifelong learning at Portland State is its centrality to the mission of University Studies, the reformed general education program and centerpiece of PSU's transformation (described by White & Ramaley *this issue*). Here is the mission statement of this innovative new program required of all undergraduates:

The purpose of the general education program, renamed University Studies, is to facilitate the acquisition of the knowledge, abilities, and attitudes which will form a foundation for lifelong learning among its students.

University Studies has four "common elements" shared by its courses: communication; diversity and multiculturalism; inquiry and critical thinking; and ethical issues and social responsibility. These common elements are conceptualized in a way that relate to the development of the capacity for lifelong learning in evolving urban environments. The expanded description of the *inquiry and critical thinking* common element, for example, references the ubiquitous nature of the capacity and disposition for lifelong learning which University Studies seeks to inculcate in all students:

Inquiry and critical thinking from an integrated educational experience that will be supportive of and complement programs and majors, contributing to ongoing, lifelong inquiry and learning after completing undergraduate education.

The centrality of lifelong learning in undergraduate education at PSU is consistent with the recommendations of a recently commissioned study of undergraduate education in Australia, *Developing Lifelong Learners through Undergraduate Education* (Candy et al. 1994). Seeing undergraduate education as a potentially critical link in fostering lifelong learning for both individuals and society as a whole,

Candy et al (1994) concluded that “when students graduate, they confront a diverse range of formal, nonformal and informal post-graduation learning opportunities, and the development of a capacity for lifelong learning should form the core of all undergraduate programs...” (1994: xii).

Lifelong learning is also at the core of the mission of PSU’s School of Extended Studies, which offers diverse credit and non-credit offerings to tens of thousands of students from the metropolitan area each year, related to professional and personal development interests. Here is its mission statement:

The School of Extended Studies projects and expands the strengths of the University in order to serve and empower *lifelong learners*. It plans and delivers both traditional and innovative programs that extend the resources of academic units to local, regional, and international audiences of lifelong learners, and they bring the community to the University. It works with private industry, government, the schools, and non-profit organizations in order to understand and anticipate those demands, and design credit and non-credit programs that address them. A fundamental principle in Extended Studies’ program delivery is service: it uses varied delivery modes, flexible time schedules, and convenient locations to be responsive to a diversity of *lifelong learners*, both on and off campus.
(emphasis added)

In considering lifelong learning in relation to the diverse offerings and programs of the School of Extended Studies, it is worth emphasizing that lifelong learning is not seen at PSU (as it is in many other institutions) as being about only work-related education. It is also seen as closely tied to individuals’ personal development, their hobbies and interests, as well as to their academic development and to efforts to promote good citizenship in the metropolitan community (cf. Boyer 1994). A few examples illustrate the diversity of PSU’s many offerings through the School of Extended Studies: Northwest Naturalistic Gardens; Opera Appreciation; Changing Global Economy; Introduction to Nonprofit Management; Urbanization and Community.

Lifelong Learning as a Vehicle for Program Development and Outreach

The third sense of lifelong learning evident in Portland State’s reforms has to do with how lifelong learning serves as a vehicle for the design and development of diverse educational programs. The process of lifelong learning is closely connected to the university’s success at expanding its market by reaching out to potential students in the metropolitan

area and drawing them into educational programs. This can perhaps most clearly be seen in extended studies courses, in which lifelong learning serves as a tool to help adults -- whether in courses related to professional development or personal growth -- begin to think of themselves as *students* again. Many of these adults, experimenting with taking a course here or there, must reestablish identities as students before becoming sufficiently comfortable to enroll as a new, returning or continuing students. Most, of course, had previously discarded their student identities after leaving school. Instructors in extended studies courses often report encountering learners’ needs to establish new identities, especially when they address the class-takers as “students”; in response, individuals frequently exhibit the telltale nervous laughter or denials that reflects their discomfort at thinking of themselves as “students”.² There is a growing body of research that demonstrates how important such identities are to successful adjustment and achievement in the educational process (Chickering & Reisser 1993). In this way, the process of lifelong learning helps PSU’s learners to develop the disposition towards further involvement in education.

There is another important way in which lifelong learning is used as a strategy to facilitate the development of innovative educational programs at Portland State. Lifelong learning and continuing education activities stimulate *partnerships* and resource-sharing arrangements among the institution’s various academic programs and initiatives. For example, a Community Development Institute was recently designed and developed through a partnership between Extended/Summer Programs and the School of Urban and Public Affairs. Growing out of the lifelong learning interests nurtured in continuing education students in the community development field, this partnership evolved into a comprehensive training program for practitioners of community-based development, and now serves professionals working in community development and other non-profit agencies. Partnerships between extended studies and other schools at Portland State exhibit the same trends in partnership-based program development. Professional development programs, for example, have grown out of partnerships between the School of Extended Studies and the School of Education (to serve working teachers) and between the School of Extended Studies and the School of Business Administration (to serve working business professionals). Such partnerships, initially rooted in the collaboration between faculty of extended studies and other PSU schools to offer specific classes, have frequently evolved into broader conversations about and the development of much more than just classes. Innovative new educational programs and initiatives within the university have been catalyzed by these lifelong learning processes. An example of a broader PSU initiative which grew out of some lifelong learning activities is the emerging undergradu-

ate degree completion program for working professionals, currently offering a new general studies degree with a business minor (with additional new degrees anticipated in the future).

In the most general terms, then, lifelong learning has served as a tool not only for the development of new programs at PSU, but as a context and a catalyst for a number of reforms which collectively are helping this urban university to transform itself by restructuring the relationships among its core teaching, research and service activities. Ongoing conversations about how to meet the needs of older and nontraditional students, and of how to embed the service of their communities into PSU's institutional culture, have been propelled by considerations of lifelong learning. Evolving conceptions of service learning, community partnerships and educational reform at Portland State have been deeply influenced by campus conversations about the role of the urban university in fostering lifelong learning among its diverse students and in the metropolitan and regional societies they comprise. The rising demands for lifelong learning among the university's students, faculty and community partners during the process of reform at PSU has stimulated the careful re-examination of assumptions about how teaching, learning, service and community should be related in the emerging urban university (Driscoll, Strauss & Longley, *this issue*).

CONCLUSION

Some of the individual innovations and reforms evident at Portland State are unique, such as the University Studies general education program. Many other innovations at PSU, on the other hand, are also evident at other institutions of higher education in the United States and around the world, especially at other urban universities. The lenses of lifelong learning described in this paper provide some perspective and help us to see the uniqueness of PSU's ongoing structural transformation in sharp relief.

Whereas many universities are responding to the imperatives for lifelong learning in ways that relate to some one sense of that term, PSU is transforming itself in ways that respond to and encompass all three senses of lifelong learning. Some institutions, serving primarily traditional college students, are innovating curricula and instruction to promote lifelong learning skills and dispositions among their undergraduates. Other institutions are innovating new programs to serve nontraditional students as lifelong learners. Few institutions, however, are consciously trying to promote lifelong learning among both traditional and nontraditional students with the same programs. Portland State's progress in doing this seems to stem from viewing its own transformation in terms of a new model of the urban university, an

institutional form believed to be better suited to serving its metropolitan communities and learners.

There is, of course, much unfinished (and some as yet unstarted) business to accomplish in this transformational process. Some key pieces that are not yet well implemented were discussed above: the realignment of student services and academic programs as well as the development of new core assessment strategies and tools. Other key developments are in the inquiry and planning stages, such as the reform of undergraduate majors (currently being considered by a faculty task force) and closer articulation of the university's programs and offerings with those of other local educational institutions (e.g., Freshman Inquiry components from University Studies are being offered experimentally to seniors in two local high schools; experimental programs that share students, faculty and curricula are being jointly operated by PSU and local community colleges; and close partnerships have been established between high school and university faculty for developing new entrance standards for higher education (see Miller-Jones *this issue*). Each of these developments has an important interface with issues of lifelong learning as seen through one or more of the lenses we have examined here. New assessment strategies and tools for example, are critical if PSU and other universities are to recognize and accredit learning not only from other educational institutions but also from other types of settings and contexts in which students -- as lifelong learners -- acquire important skills, knowledge and expertise.

Lifelong learning thus has broad currency in PSU's ongoing reform and transformation into a newly styled urban institution. Perhaps this will not seem surprising when we think about the key features of lifelong learning: it places both *lifelong* and *learning* at the center of education. PSU's reflections on what this means for its emerging urban model have propelled a reconsideration of learning in the university and how best to reorganize the institution to support and facilitate learning. Learning is no longer seen as the unique consequence of teaching; instead, teaching is seen as one of the factors contributing to learning (cf. Latiolais *this issue*). This leads to thinking of academic programs not as curricula to be delivered but as contexts and environments in which learning occurs. A particularly important example of this in PSU's transformation is University Studies, a program in which rich environments have been designed to facilitate and support learning by creating appropriate contexts for students to interact with peers, mentors and faculty. These programmatic spaces and rich webs of interaction are intended as environments in which learning communities and lifelong learners develop. They offer the commuting, nontraditional student access to an important learning context and experience that otherwise might be exceedingly difficult to find in the urban setting.

Placing learning at the center of university experience is also beginning to drive a new way of organizing PSU's other (i.e., noninstructional) functions, services and resources to support learning. Placing *lifelong* at the center has helped bring about new ways of relating institutional activities to the other roles, contexts, settings and resources that nontraditional students bring to the university, and to asking how they may be better utilized as resources for learning, outreach and service. PSU's emerging and rapidly growing community-based learning programs are an example of the central role such developments may have in the unfolding new urban model.

As suggested above, much of this institutional future will likely be shaped directly by the lived experience of lifelong learning among PSU's students and faculty and by how the university responds to and is changed by the various aspects of lifelong learning. If we remain supportive of lifelong learning, we shall surely know more about what it is.

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Extended Studies, for sharing her experience and insight on this and related matters.

要 約

生涯学習と教育改革

「生涯学習 (lifelong learning)」は、米国における高等教育改革の論議の中でますます聞かれるようになった概念である。生涯学習はポートランド州立大学 (PSU) において行われている多くの重要な改革の中心である。この用語は例えば、大学学習の役割を記述したもの、PSU の新しい一般教育プログラム、および PSU の継続教育の役割を記述したものの中に見られる。この論文は PSU で行われつつある教育改革における生涯学習の種々の意味を考察する。生涯学習における次の 3 つの概念を確認し対比する：生涯学習者としての学生；カリキュラムの到達点としての生涯学習；プログラム開発と到達のための道具としての生涯学習。

それぞれの概念は、PSU における機構改革の様々な局面と関係している。この論文では、この大学で行われつつある改革を理解し、明白であるが部分的に重複している側面を見るためのある種のレンズとしてこれらの構成概念を用いる。それぞれのレンズは、PSU における生涯学習がいかに都市型大学を作ってきたかという成長モデルを新しい側面から明らかにする。PSU の機構改革の過程は、このような生涯学習の側面が大学の構造と機能に与えたインパクトと密接に関係している。

(Stephen Reder)