

At the 2nd Annual American Democracy Project held in Portland, Oregon from June 16-18, 2005, George Mehaffy, Vice President for Academic Leadership and Change with the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AACU), discusses the integral role that Portland State University plays in fostering civic engagement and creating empowered communities.

"Several years ago, the American Association of Colleges and Universities, in an effort to distinguish our membership from a number of other institutions in the highly aspirational world of American higher education, coined the phrase "Stewards of Place." The notion embedded in that phrase is that our institutions are rooted inextricably in their communities in ways that major research institutions are not. Many of our students come from 100 miles around, and most will go back and live their lives within a 100 miles. AACU institutions are connected to their communities in the students that they teach, in the research they conduct, and in the service that they provide. Consider for moment the difference between Portland State University and Harvard. If Harvard disappears tomorrow, the other 60+ institutions there will continue, students planning to attend Harvard will go elsewhere, and life will go on. But if Portland State University disappears tomorrow, the citizens and communities of Portland, the state of Oregon, and the entire Northwest will be impoverished in ways that are unimaginable."

"When the history of higher education is written about the latter part of the 20th century and the early years of the 21st century, I believe historians will look back to institutions such as Portland State University (PSU) and Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) as the leaders who redefined institutions of higher learning, no longer as ivory towers separated from their communities but instead as institutions of their communities. These institutions created an campus-wide commitment to the community through community-based learning for students, applied scholarship addressing community problems for faculty, and a broader definition of service that encouraged linkages between the institution and the community."