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2009 Survey Names Nation's Top 25 "Best Neighbor" Colleges and Universities

Higher Education Veteran Says

Economy Makes Town-Gown Relationship "more important than ever"

PHILADELPHIA, Pa. (Oct. 12, 2009) – Declaring that the current state of the U.S. economy makes the economic relationship between institutions of higher education and their local communities “more important than ever,” Dr. Evan S. Dobbelle, President of Westfield State College, today named the nation’s top 25 “best neighbor” colleges and universities.

In the presentation, “Saviors of Our Cities: A Survey of Best College and University Civic Partnerships,” the University of Pennsylvania and the University of Southern California tied for number one. The University of Dayton (OH) and the University of Pittsburgh (PA) tied for second, and Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IN) completes the top five. Creighton University (NE), Case Western Reserve University (OH), Tulane University (LA), Portland State University (OR), and Drexel University (PA) are in the Top Ten. The list’s 25 academic institutions were selected because of their positive impact on their urban communities, including both commercial and residential activities such as revitalization, cultural renewal, economics, and community service and development. In addition, 100 other institutions are recognized on an Honor Roll.

Appearing here before the 15th annual conference of the Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities (CUMU), Dr. Dobbelle said, “Colleges and universities, as well as the towns and cities in which they are located, are now under severe economic pressures. The positive financial impact of higher education on local communities is well-documented,” said Dr. Dobbelle. “Increasingly,” he said, “more sophisticated partnerships are emerging that are addressing complex issues such as homelessness and health care and are serving as catalysts for community change. Colleges and universities are doing more and more to support their local communities, and it is a win-win situation for both.”

“It’s regrettable that with almost a trillion dollars in bailout or stimulus money that more of these funds are not being invested in projects sponsored by campus-based civic engagement initiatives. Projects don’t come much more turn-key than those in the higher education-community alliance sphere,” said Dr. Dobbelle.

The Saviors of Our Cities rankings are composed of academic institutions diverse in size, geography and course offerings. They have demonstrated and documented long-standing cooperative efforts with community leaders to rehabilitate the cities around them, to influence community revitalization and cultural renewal, and to encourage economic expansion of the local economy, urban development and community service. They include:

1. University of Pennsylvania – Philadelphia, PA
1. University of Southern California – Los Angeles, CA
2. University of Dayton – Dayton, OH
2. University of Pittsburgh – Pittsburgh, PA
5. Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis – Indianapolis, IN
6. Creighton University – Omaha, NE
7. Case Western Reserve University – Cleveland, OH
8. Tulane University – New Orleans, LA
9. Portland State University – Portland, OR
10. Drexel University – Philadelphia, PA
11. Virginia Commonwealth University – Richmond, VA
12. University of Louisville – Louisville, KY
13. University of Rochester – Rochester, NY
14. University of Houston – Houston, TX

14. University of Missouri at Kansas City – Kansas City, MO
14. University of Missouri at St. Louis – St. Louis, MO
17. Emory University – Atlanta, GA
18. University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee – Milwaukee, WI
19. Carnegie Mellon University – Pittsburgh, PA
20. Rhode Island School of Design – Providence, RI
21. Miami-Dade College – Miami
22. St. Louis University – St. Louis, MO
23. Rutgers-Newark, State University of New Jersey – Newark, NJ
24. George Washington University – Washington, DC
25. University of Nebraska-Omaha – Omaha, NE

Dr. Dobbelle published his first Saviors of Our Cities survey in 2006, when he was president of the New England Board of Higher Education, one of the four federally authorized regional consortiums of colleges in America. His re-examination of the 2006 rankings was prompted in part by the change in the United States economy and the desire to track the evolution and growing sophistication of efforts by institutions of higher learning to save their cities from increasing blight. The survey of colleges and universities is an outcome of more than 20 years of professional experience and ongoing research, and included a questionnaire and discussion. A comprehensive questionnaire was widely distributed to colleges and universities with assistance from the American Council on Education (ACE) and Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities (CUMU).

Evan Dobbelle has served as president of six institutions of higher education, as well as in government positions at the federal, state, and local level. He is an internationally respected educator and public official who has been honored for his hands on experience spearheading public/private partnerships to significantly enhance the campus and community at each of the institutions he has led. He holds bachelor's and master's degrees and a doctorate in Higher Education Administration from the University of Massachusetts Amherst and a master's in Public Administration from Harvard University.

Criteria for assessment in the 2009 survey remained consistent with the 2006 survey, providing benchmarks for the development and growth of the original institutions and serving as comparators for new additions to the rankings. The criteria include the following:

- Length of involvement with the community
- Real dollars invested
- Catalyst effect on others
- Presence felt through payroll, research and purchasing power
- Faculty and student involvement in community service
- Continued sustainability of neighborhood initiatives
- Effect on local student access and affordability to attend college through K-12 partnerships
- Qualitative esprit of the institution in its engagement
- Quantifiable increase in positive recognition of the institution
- Increase in student applications and resources raised through renewed alumni giving
- Recognition of the impact of these institutions within their community

A complete list of rankings including the *Honor Roll*, will be available online as of Monday, October 12, 2009 at 10 a.m. at www.wsc.ma.edu/top25saviors.