

Situating Outreach and Engagement in the University: Concepts, Challenges, and Opportunities

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INTRODUCTION

Outreach, engagement, community involvement, student engagement, and economic development—the concept takes many related forms; but they all point to the fact that higher education institutions are responding to society’s increasing requirements for accountability. Colleges and universities large and small, public and private have emerged from their ivory towers and are investing their resources and expertise in hands-on involvement to address important societal issues.

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The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, long recognized for its classification systems for higher education institutions, added a voluntary classification category for community engagement in 2005. Since that time, 196 institutions have received this classification.

Many public land-grant universities, which have a common mission that includes a commitment to public service, have been among the first to embrace and advance the outreach and engagement agenda. Each author of this paper represents a public land grant institution—Washington State University, Pennsylvania State University, and Michigan State University—that, although similar in many ways, has responded differently to the challenge of increasing outreach and engagement profiles. The organizational structures and strategies used to integrate these activities into the institutional mainstream represents, to a certain degree, varying philosophies and approaches.

These universities provide three perspectives on programs and structure that support outreach and engagement activities, including the role that continuing and distance education units can play in enhancing the institution's community involvement efforts.

Many related terms are employed to reference community involvement activities, with variations depending on participant focus (e.g., student engagement) and audience focus (e.g., civic engagement). For the purposes of this article, the terms "outreach" and "engagement" have been used interchangeably, using the Carnegie Foundation definition of community engagement, described as the collaboration between higher education institutions and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2008).

WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY

Washington State University (WSU) is a research-intensive, land-grant institution with its flagship campus located in a rural area of eastern Washington. The university has smaller campuses in Spokane, Tri-Cities, and Vancouver (Washington), research stations in several key agricultural areas of the state, and extension offices in every county. Enrollments on all campuses during 2008 totaled 25,352.

Excerpts from the university's mission statement address its focus on outreach and engagement:

[Washington State University is]...a public research university committed to its land-grant heritage and tradition of service to society. Our mission is three fold:

- to advance knowledge . . .;
- to extend knowledge . . .; and
- to apply knowledge through local and global engagement that will improve quality of life and enhance the economy of the state, nation, and world.

One of four goals in the institution's most recent strategic plan also addresses this topic: lead in relevant local, national, and global outreach and engagement.

Does the institutional understanding of outreach and engagement match the rhetoric of its mission and strategic goals? Truthfully, it is a mixed bag. In parts of the university faculty and students are involved directly in various forms of engaged activities and are committed to that concept. In other parts, that is much less the case.

However, the university has recently modified its administrative structure to provide more support and oversight for engagement activities. In 2007, the position of Vice President for Economic Development and Extension was established, providing senior administrative support and focus for outreach and engagement. The position has recently been re-titled Vice President for Economic Development and Global Engagement but still provides leadership for the institution's engagement efforts.

Another university entity that has been instrumental in maintaining visibility for outreach and engagement throughout the institutional community is the Outreach and Engagement Council. Now reporting to the Vice President for Economic Development and Global Engagement, the council was created in 2000, at a time when engagement was much less visible within the institution. The council, consisting of members from all academic colleges and many engagement-related units (e.g., civic engagement, branch campuses, Small Business Development Center), was successful in keeping the concept on the university's radar screen even when other issues were more prominent. With the new position providing leadership, the council has played a more important role in advancing the engagement agenda. For example, in 2008 members of the council took responsibility for completing the university's successful application for the Community

Engagement designation from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. The designation provided an especially relevant rationale to bring increased visibility to the institution's engagement agenda, and there are plans for leveraging the designation.

Several units represented on the Outreach and Engagement Council play important roles in addressing specific aspects of an engaged institution. WSU Extension serves citizens statewide with offices in each county in addition to a number of research centers. The Center for Civic Engagement coordinates opportunities that promote civic responsibility and involvement for students and faculty. Washington Small Business Development Centers provide advice, training and research to entrepreneurs and existing businesses statewide. In addition, individual faculty and units throughout all campuses and locations of the institution provide a wide range of projects and activities that demonstrate engagement involvement.

Distance and continuing education also play a major role in meeting WSU's goals for outreach and engagement. The Center for Distance and Profession Education (CDPE) is the primary coordinating unit for these activities, delivering a range of online programs to thousands of students each semester, mostly in Washington but with enrollments from around the world. CDPE also houses a conference management unit that coordinates academic conferences, workshops, and seminars in both face-to-face and online formats. These noncredit activities create valuable opportunities to disseminate WSU research and provide lifelong learning to professional audiences. The natural connections between WSU Extension and CDPE—serving some of the same audiences, providing lifelong learning opportunities, focusing on non-campus-based clientele—have allowed our two units to develop a number of partnerships for program delivery, including the Master Gardner Program, which has been successfully offered through Extension for many years. Through a joint project between the units, CDPE course designers and media professionals helped to put the program into an online format, making it potentially available to a much larger audience.

PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY

Penn State is a multi-campus, public research university and serves as Pennsylvania's land-grant institution. The university's administrative and research hub is located at the State College campus, in the rural center of the state, serving 44,000 students. An additional 19 commonwealth campuses located throughout the state plus four special mission campuses, including

medical and law schools, and Penn State's virtual World Campus, serve another 48,500 students. Penn State offers Pennsylvania residents access through 113 outreach "doors," including cooperative extension offices in every county, agricultural research stations, continuing education and technical assistance sites, and public radio and television.

The university's mission statement speaks to "integrated programs of teaching, research, and service" as well as "collaborative activities with industrial, educational, and agricultural partners." The outreach division's vision statement proposes to "aggressively advance the university as the premier innovative, engaged institution of higher education in the country." Specifically, Penn State Outreach's strategic plan targets engagement collaboration between the university and communities associated with health, education, energy and the environment, globalization, and economic and workforce development.

While the language of "service," "extension," and "outreach" is pervasive at Penn State, "engagement" is used less frequently and has a wider range of definitions than the others. Responsibility for the university's interface with external constituents is vested primarily in the Vice President for Outreach. The outreach division of Penn State is home to approximately 1,600 employees and is organized around four primary program areas: continuing and distance education, cooperative extension (which has a dual reporting line to the Dean of the College of Agricultural Sciences), public broadcasting, and economic and workforce development.

The Vice President for Outreach has two formal advisory groups, one internal and one external. The external Outreach Advisory Board is composed of business, government, and civic leaders who meet with the senior outreach leadership twice a year. The internal Council on Engagement consists of associate deans with outreach responsibility from the academic colleges and selected campus chancellors. This internal advisory group meets every other month during the academic year with the senior leadership of outreach. A third important stakeholder group is the Faculty Senate Committee on Outreach, which meets monthly with outreach leadership and serves as a formal channel between outreach and the university's shared governance system.

In the past decade, a number of significant developments have occurred at Penn State to bolster the profile of outreach and engagement within the university.

Penn State's president, Graham Spanier, served as chairperson of the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges' Kellogg Commission, which issued a set of six reports on the future of public institutions of higher education. Among these reports was "Returning to Our Roots: The Engaged Institution," which focused on state and land-grant universities' public compact and called for greater attention to solving local problems through two-way partnerships—engagement—between universities and communities. In response to this report, Penn State hosted a national conference, "Best Practices in Outreach and Public Service: The Scholarship of Engagement." Because this conference theme resonated deeply with the higher education community, Penn State has since partnered with other universities to host an annual National Outreach Scholarship conference.

In the late 1990s, a small group of faculty interested in increasing the recognition of scholarship associated with outreach obtained extramural funding to research and author the UniSCOPE (University Scholarship and Criteria for Outreach and Performance Evaluation) report, billed as "a multidimensional model of scholarship for the 21st century." The core ideas and recommendations of the UniSCOPE report were adopted by the Penn State Faculty Senate in 2001 and have since been recognized by many university tenure and promotion committees.

Those early foundations began to broaden interest in engagement at Penn State. Since then, three additional milestones have been achieved. The Faculty Senate Outreach Committee recommended the creation of a Center for Engagement to support the engagement work of faculty and others at the university. Penn State was selected in 2008 as the national winner of the C. Peter Mcgrath University-Community Engagement Award, and the university was awarded the Carnegie Community Engagement Elective Classification.

Despite these significant achievements, engagement at Penn State is still very much a work in progress. Common understandings about the nature of engagement and deep commitments required to establish and maintain partnerships that make lasting impacts on complex community issues are still evolving. However, interest is high and continues to grow. There is much reason for optimism about the future of engagement at Penn State University.

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

Michigan State University (MSU) is Michigan's land-grant university and a research-intensive institution. The pairing of these functions is at the core of the university's identity. MSU Extension is active in all 83 counties. The university also operates the Michigan Agricultural Experiment Station, which funds 300 scientists on campus and at 15 research stations across Michigan. MSU's International Studies and Programs supports international development and a top-ranked study abroad program. The university annually attracts hundreds of millions of dollars in sponsored research. Its National Superconducting Cyclotron Laboratory will expand over the next 10 years into a \$550 million US Department of Energy-funded research facility, the Facility for Rare Isotope Beams. MSU's 17 degree-granting colleges offer more than 200 programs of study. In 2008 the university had 46,648 students, 5,052 faculty and academic appointees, and 6,166 support staff.

In the late 1980s the university began to reexamine its longstanding core value of service to society. At that time MSU was managing a successful cooperative extension program and a centralized continuing education division. While these units extended the reach of the university into the community, the question was the role of the colleges and faculty in a 21st century land-grant research university.

A landmark provost's committee report defined university outreach as "a form of scholarship that cuts across teaching, research, and service. It involves generating, transmitting, applying, and preserving knowledge for the direct benefit of external audiences in ways that are consistent with university and unit missions." Key to this definition was the assertion that outreach is not synonymous with "service," but may be a part of research and teaching as well. This position resonated with Ernest Boyer's attempt in 1990 to define a "scholarship of engagement."

The institution consequently placed a new emphasis on promoting community-engaged scholarship with the help of a \$10 million W. K. Kellogg Foundation grant to build a model for this work. Continuing education was decentralized, shifting responsibility for instructional outreach to the college level. A new office, now called University Outreach and Engagement (UOE), was created to provide campus-wide academic support and advocacy, and positioned squarely within the academic side of the administrative structure. In 1996 a faculty committee produced "Points of Distinction: A Guidebook for Planning and Evaluating Quality Outreach," which was recognized with the 1998 University Continuing Education Association Innovations

Award. In 2001 MSU revised its faculty reappointment, promotion, and tenure (RP&T) process to allow faculty to claim their outreach accomplishments as research and teaching as well as service; “Points of Distinction” was cited as a primary reference in the new RP&T packet.

Also in 2001, UOE redirected its considerable energies and resources toward better supporting community-engaged research. Two councils were created to advise the Associate Provost for University Outreach and Engagement: the UOE campus senior fellows (mostly senior scholars) and community senior fellows (leaders representing differing interests from across Michigan). Fellows participate in departmental initiatives and meet annually in a joint advisory session.

Today UOE’s 10 departments and centers have created many new models for productive university-community networks and partnerships. Relationships with urban and tribal communities, and historically black colleges and universities create contexts of trust for faculty engagement. Campus-based bodies promote engagement within the arts and humanities, with the university’s performing arts center and museum launching dynamic new programs. Student service-learning and civic-engagement placements have more than doubled since 2002 to over 15,000 per year. An online system annually collects data from faculty and academic staff university-wide about their outreach and engagement activities. These data inform administration, accreditation reports, and Carnegie Community Engagement self-studies (MSU piloted and was among the first to receive the elective classification). The database also supports development of stories and program descriptions for “engaged scholars” publications and web-based public access catalogues. Original research is exploring the processes and practices associated with university engagement. Learning programs are fostering professional development and reflection about engaged scholarship for students and faculty. Finally, the university has implemented internal awards for exemplary engaged scholarship.

MSU’s ongoing commitment to its engagement mission has been supported at the highest level. President Lou Anna K. Simon, who served as provost during the 1990s, has been steadfast in her advocacy. Upon becoming president, she embedded outreach and engagement throughout her strategic imperatives for the University. Several deans have prioritized community engagement and while faculty are still reconciling the language of outreach and engagement with the rhetorical traditions of their disciplines, there is clearly a great deal community-engaged scholarship going on at MSU.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The institutions included here are all research-intensive land-grant universities with strong extension programs. MSU and Penn State were early to recognize the importance of outreach and engagement to their institutions and to society, and are regarded as pioneers in defining and integrating the concepts. WSU was able to use the earlier works from these and other institutions to re-examine its own efforts and bring the concepts into clearer focus through organizational and definitional structure. All three institutions have been awarded the Carnegie Classification as “community engaged” institutions.

The organizational structures that coordinate engagement activities at these institutions have significant variation, but they have one important organizational component in common—a senior administrator with leadership responsibility for this focus.

Another common component is the fact that the definition and integration of engagement as an integral part of each institution is a continuing process. As noted at Penn State, it is a “work in progress.”

What lessons might be gleaned from the experiences of these three land grant institutions that can be applied to other institutions of varying size and with different missions? Here are some suggestions:

- Build on the work already done by other institutions and organizations. The references included here provide a good start.
- Ensure that your institution’s mission and strategic plan support the concepts of outreach and engagement.
- Identify a senior administrator to assume leadership for the effort.
- Cultivate advocates and champions.
- Identify and celebrate exemplars and create discourse about what community engagement might look like across disciplines. Sometimes willing faculty simply need examples.
- Recognize that integration requires institution-wide involvement and commitment.
- Recognize that integration is an on-going effort. An institution-wide team with a continuing focus on the topic is one way to maintain its priority status.
- Consider applying for designation as a Carnegie community-engaged institution. The application process itself helps the

institution assess its engagement status against national standards, and gaining the designation can be used to promote its commitment to various kinds of community involvement.

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