

University of Connecticut Faculty Programs

Shawn Kornegay

Since 2009, public engagement efforts at the University of Connecticut have been on the fast track. Former Provost Peter Nicholls asked School of Pharmacy Dean Robert McCarthy to chair the Provost's Commission on Public Engagement. Formed to extend and enhance the university's presence in communities as well as interactions with people both throughout and beyond Connecticut, the commission was originally called the Public Engagement Forum and was made up of enthusiastic faculty and staff volunteers from across campus. Although the group did not formally report to the Provost's Office, Dean McCarthy led it in successfully applying for the Carnegie Foundation Community Engagement classification designation.

Upon receiving the designation in 2011, the university was invited to join TRUCEN. In 2010, members of the Public Engagement Forum finished developing a 5-year strategic plan. Subsequently an Office of Public Engagement was established. The Public Engagement Forum remained as an operational unit of volunteers under the umbrella of the Office of Public Engagement, led by co-chairs Preston Britner and Cheryl Parks. The Public Engagement Forum operates with seven standing committees.

"There were a whole series of university-wide initiatives and support that occurred really quite rapidly through the President's Office and the Provost's Office during the first three years, 2009–2011," Dean McCarthy explained in a personal communication on August 21, 2012. During 2012, the bar was raised even higher when the Office of Public Engagement acquired a full-time staff person and a physical office to make the university's broad and comprehensive range of resources more available to constituents and the public. Previously, the Office of Public Engagement operated through 10% of Dean McCarthy's time, in addition to a part-time pharmacy student and volunteers. There was no official office—only a random workspace in the School of Pharmacy. "It's a tremendous benefit to have a full-time person focused on public engagement and dedicated to our efforts," said Dean McCarthy in the same communication. "A staff member to support our service-learning activities, public engagement activities, and be someone volunteers can rely on is a huge change for this year."

The Office of Public Engagement benefited in 2012 from the elevation of Dean McCarthy to executive director of the Office to Vice Provost of Public Engagement. He said,

The title and position were things we hoped would occur several years from now. It happened much sooner than anticipated. In terms of that part of our goal and plan, we are much ahead of what we had hoped for. . . . When my time as vice provost ends, that title and position will remain. A person will be recruited full-time to that position.

University of Connecticut's public engagement endeavors are described in greater detail at <http://engagement.uconn.edu/index.html>.

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