



Creating an Outreach Culture

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A Context for Reaching Out

The current discussion of the public university's role of service to society has spawned widespread reexamination of mission, values, structures, and reward and delivery systems in higher education. The desire to enhance responsiveness to pressing social, economic, and environmental issues has given rise to the concept of an "engaged university," which is one of several important themes being addressed by the Kellogg Commission on the Future of the Land-Grant University. This concept of engagement was first proffered by the late Ernest Boyer who wrote:

The scholarship of engagement means connecting the rich resources of the university to our most pressing social, civic, and ethical problems, to our children, to our schools, to our teachers, and to our cities. . . . I have this growing conviction that what's also needed is not just more programs, but a larger purpose, a larger sense of mission, a larger clarity of direction in the nation's life as we move toward century twenty-one (1996, 19-20).

C. Peter Magrath, president of the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, recently summarized the importance of an engaged university at an outreach leadership retreat held at The Pennsylvania State University:

America's colleges and universities . . . must adapt and change. Yesterday's good works are inadequate for tomorrow's needs. We must recognize the new realities of diminished public resources while facing our shortcomings forthrightly. Clearly, these include our need to use faculty time more productively, our obligation to pay more attention to undergraduate students and to become full-time collaborators with public schools, and our duty to link research discoveries and educational insights with our states

and communities in partnerships that strengthen our economy and society. And we dare not be afraid to use the new technologies — most of them spawned in our universities — to improve how we teach, learn, and communicate in a world not defined by campus boundaries or restricted by towers built of ivory. . . . These are some of the rich possibilities inherent in the new outreach university (1998, 2).

While it is this notion of engagement for the public good that forms the cornerstone of a renewed reexamination of the university in service to society, there are other factors that add additional impetus to this review of the academy's mission. One of the most significant is the public concern for how tax dollars are being used. Increased national attention for this concern is reflected in the request for proposals required by many federal agencies. At the National Science Foundation and the National Institutes for Health, for example, proposals now require an outreach plan for dissemination of findings to the public, and this dimension has become an important consideration in the proposal-review process.

Neal Lane, director of the National Science Foundation, reflects on the importance of accountability and the need to disseminate research findings in a manner understood by the public at large:

Even NSF is changing, realizing a new responsibility as an advocate for the cause of science and engineering to the public. . . . We are not doing a service to the research community or the public if we do not help [to] make the case about why science and technology matter in people's lives. Given today's budgetary climate, neither the federal R&D agencies nor the research community can afford to appear isolated from the taxpayer who pays the bills. . . . [We must realize] how important it is for the research community, the universities, and the scientific and engineering societies to actively get the message out about science and technology and its critical connection to this country's social and economic welfare (1997, 4).

The Culture of Outreach

Many American colleges and universities are reshaping their institutional culture and rethinking their role in outreach to realize new levels of communication and engagement. Tierney and Chaffee, in *Collegiate Culture and Leadership Strategies*, note that culture is "reflected in what is done, how it is done, and who is involved in doing it" (1988, 7). Furthermore, culture helps to "determine decisions, actions, and communication at the instrumental and symbolic level. . . . The culture of an organization is grounded in the

shared assumptions of individuals participating in the organization" (p. 7). When assessing the organizational culture of colleges and universities in support of outreach, one finds this area often characterized by:

- The absence of a clearly articulated vision and mission incorporating the importance of outreach.
- Lack of institutional champion(s) advocating for this mission.
- Underdeveloped communication, coordination, and collaboration among major outreach units, programs, and faculty across the university, resulting in some duplication of effort and lack of synergy among providers, programs, and audiences.
- Specific individual department or faculty interests not integrated as part of a comprehensive university-wide plan for outreach.
- Imbalance in the value and importance placed on outreach initiatives and inadequate financial support, and reward and recognition systems, to encourage both unit and faculty participation.
- A poorly documented reporting system for gathering and sharing outreach activities.
- An underdeveloped evaluation process for measuring quality and impact of outreach activities for unit and individual assessment.

A dozen or so universities are leading the cultural change to support outreach. Major initiatives have taken place at Auburn, Clemson, Georgia, Illinois, Michigan State, Oregon State, and the University of California at Davis, to name but a few. These institutions are addressing questions such as: How do we change culture in organizations with a complex history, highly diversified goals, and often independent structures? How do we more effectively interest faculty in outreach?

In order to achieve the goal of creating a seamless institution committed to a common set of guiding principles for outreach, the benefits of extending college and university expertise and resources must be widely understood by both external and internal audiences. Outreach is a two-way process through which the active exchange of information with external constituencies occurs. Engaged universities have much to offer and much to gain from identifying the needs of people and communities. True partnerships are developed with citizens, other educational institutions, associations, organizations, business and industry, and government. These partnerships enrich the university, its knowledge, and its faculty and staff. Specific benefits include:

- Improving the teaching/learning process.
- Opening new lines of inquiry for research and expanding faculty and university visibility and opportunity.
- Cultivating supporters for fund raising and identifying new sources of income.
- Enhancing student and faculty recruiting.
- Providing opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students to gain practical experience and apply newly acquired knowledge and skills.

These benefits of outreach provide a compelling case for cultural change within the university, and leaders must dedicate time and energy to foster an environment where the reasons for change can be embraced. Tierney and Chaffee, recognizing that significant cultural change takes a long time to achieve, offer a set of principles which guides this process:

Coping with change in an evolutionary fashion requires at least three ingredients. First, leaders need to understand the historical roots of the organization, the themes that echo from its founding to the present. Leaders need to draw on these themes and seek new interpretations of them that can respond to new challenges. Second, organizations need to keep their eyes on the present and look into the future, both inside and outside the organization. . . . Third, leaders need to understand the limits of organizational identity — what the organization will do and what it will not do. This is not to say that identity is static, but leaders must recognize when they are asking for change of this magnitude and proceed accordingly (1988, 184).

Guiding Principles for Outreach

Colleges and universities that have taken leadership in this area, employ a number of emerging principles to facilitate cultural change. These include:

- Having the president and provost serve as visible champions for outreach.
- Creating an office for outreach at a senior level for leadership, advocacy, and coordination.
- Recognizing outreach as a vital component of the teaching, research, and service missions of the university and not just equated with service.
- Developing an organizational structure that facilitates coordination and collaboration across colleges and outreach units.
- Integrating outreach into institutional planning and resource allocation processes.
- Requiring that outreach become a part of every academic unit's mission and strategic plan.
- Preparing and supporting faculty to engage in outreach.
- Developing new tools for measuring the quality and impact of outreach.
- Engaging students in outreach activities.
- Recording and communicating outreach activities with stakeholders

Developing support for these principles is the first step in achieving a culture that supports outreach.

Outreach at Penn State

Upon his arrival at Penn State and in his inaugural State-of-the-University Address, President Graham Spanier committed to making the university a national leader in the integration of teaching, research, and service.

My goal is for the university to be the top institution in the United States in the integration of teaching, research, and service. We are currently one of the leading institutions in each of these three broad areas, viewed separately. . . . I believe we can and should be identified as the leading model of how a land-grant university simultaneously provides excellence in undergraduate education, graduate education, research, scholarship, and creative activity, technology transfer and promotion of economic development, continuing and distance education, cooperative extension, public and professional service, the promotion of health and human development, and the cultural advancement of society (1995, 7).

After a review of university outreach activities, and following discussions with key internal and external constituents, he developed "A Plan to Strengthen Outreach and Cooperative Extension" by bringing together cooperative extension, continuing education, distance education, and public broadcasting, and enhancing closer coordination with technology-transfer activities. Key actions of the university's new plan include:

- (1) Redefining the role of the senior officer, formerly vice president for Continuing and Distance Education, and creating a new title — vice president for Outreach and Cooperative Extension — to provide for stronger advocacy, coordination, and leadership for outreach and extension activities.

- (2) Appointing a director of Cooperative Extension, who also serves both as associate vice president for Outreach as well as associate dean in the College of Agricultural Sciences.

- (3) Creating a joint responsibility for the administration of Cooperative Extension between the vice president for Outreach and Cooperative Extension and the dean of Agricultural Sciences.

- (4) Changing the title of the assistant/associate dean for Continuing and Distance Education in each college to be consistent with the title of the vice president for Outreach and Cooperative Extension, and broadening responsibilities to include extension liaison and coordination in each college.

(5) Changing the title and expanding the responsibilities of the Academic Council on Continuing and Distance Education, comprising academic officers from each college and key outreach units, to the Coordinating Council for Outreach and Cooperative Extension to enhance policy and program development and coordination.

(6) Creating regional councils throughout the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania for Outreach and Cooperative Extension to enhance communication, cooperation, and collaboration among all Penn State locations involved in outreach and extension.

With a reorganized administrative structure and leadership in place, significant consultation was held to develop specific objectives of the plan. More than five hundred hours of discussion took place over a six-month period with key internal and external stakeholders. An action plan was created which includes twenty-five separate initiatives. Examples of these strategies are included under the following goals:

- *Enhance outreach program development, delivery, and impact.* Highlights include adding program leaders in agricultural and natural resources, children, youth, and families, and economic and community development; developing several university-wide initiatives including children, youth, and families to enhance and expand the teaching, research, and service activities; holding a two-day retreat on outreach for deans, department heads, and all outreach-unit directors to create a greater awareness and attention to this area.
- *Establish greater communication and coordination among all units of the university.* Examples include holding regional retreats throughout the Commonwealth to enhance networking and collaboration among outreach leaders; conducting a comprehensive outreach inventory to catalog activities for both internal and external dissemination; developing a common orientation program for all outreach staff; creating an internship exchange program where outreach members can learn of other units' activities; implementing mechanisms to integrate needs analyses conducted across outreach units; and developing program review processes to ensure communication and collaboration.
- *Increase the engagement of university faculty, staff, and students in outreach programs through greater reward and recognition processes.* Actions include creating a university-wide faculty award for excellence in outreach with nominees selected by the Coordinating Council for Outreach and Cooperative Extension and the Faculty Senate Committee for Outreach; developing and distributing a quarterly publication which highlights examples of faculty engagement in outreach; and moving outreach from the service component of the promotion-and-tenure dossier to each of

the three major sections: teaching, research and scholarship, and service.

- *Increase access through enhanced technology.* Highlights include exploring the creation of new outreach centers supported by technology; providing resources to support community and economic development through information technology networking; and creating an enhanced university-wide technology infrastructure with additional equipment to support knowledge dissemination and distance education.
- *Increase funding and support of all outreach activity.* Examples include establishing a study group to explore alternative sources of income using various budgeting means to enhance all outreach units; increasing support for grant writing and fund raising for outreach activities; and earmarking funds for proposals that reflect collaborative efforts across colleges and outreach units.

These strategies are intended to enhance the university as a proactive, responsive organization, one that is indispensable to the Commonwealth and is committed to improving the quality of life of its citizens. Furthermore, these actions are focused on creating a seamless, university-wide network where individuals engaged in outreach can feel free to cross perceived internal boundaries. Through this comprehensive approach, cultural change to support outreach has become a shared vision and responsibility. The importance of shifting from operating in individual silos to a more seamless provider of resources is defined by Kanter, Stein, and Jick in *The Challenge of Organizational Change*:

Such a model for a 'new' organization represents a triumph of process over structure. That is, relationships, communication, and the flexibility to combine resources are more important than the 'formal' channels and reporting relationships represented on an organizational chart. In an environment requiring speed and dexterity, what is important is not how responsibilities are divided but how people can pull together to pursue new opportunities (1992, 232).

Through the process of redefining the role of the university as one that responds to the continually evolving external environment, Penn State is committed to becoming a leader in providing its resources in service to society.

Summary

Colleges and universities must embrace the need to use their resources and expertise to address the issues and opportunities

facing the individuals, organizations, and communities they serve. This is accomplished by integrating teaching, research, and service. With institutions becoming more visible and responsive to their stakeholders, increased public support for an "engaged university" will occur. ■

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