



## **Strengthening and Sustaining Faculty Professional Service**

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One of the important ingredients in the service-learning process, which Boyer (1990) calls the process of scholarship, is reflection. As the New England Resource Center for Higher Education (NERCHE) comes to the end of a five-year project focused on faculty professional service, I'd like to share my reflections on that project. As I look back at the development of the project, our lessons learned may be useful to institutions grappling with institutionalizing service.

The NERCHE Project on Faculty Professional Service and Academic Outreach was established to (1) raise the general level of interest, awareness, and information about faculty professional service; (2) support and assist campus efforts in developing policies

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and structures that encourage faculty public service and outreach; (3) monitor the faculty's progress in outreach endeavors; and (4) disseminate the results of these efforts, regionally and nationally. By the third year, the original project had developed into the Program on Faculty Professional Service and Academic Outreach with three projects under its umbrella: the Faculty Professional Service Project to carry out the initial

charge; Project Colleague to help faculty gain the skills needed to initiate and sustain community projects; and the Portfolio Project to develop ways to document and evaluate service. In hindsight, this outcome looks purposeful and clear; in reality, this structure grew out of discovery, need, mistakes, and opportunities. As the work of

the initial project progressed, we became more sophisticated about the meaning of faculty professional service and the process of institutional change. It is in this context that we have lessons to share.

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- Be prepared to take longer than you think to define faculty professional service, and don't expect to be completely satisfied with the result.

Our discussion began with naming the project and continued through the first full year. We define faculty professional service as work that is based on a faculty member's expertise and contributes to the outreach mission of the university. Key components are that the service benefit an entity outside the institution; that faculty use their capacities as experts in certain fields; and that products resulting from professional service are not proprietary, but are public, available, and shared.

Our definition is informed by many discussions, various institutional missions, and the work of Ernest Lynton (1987 and 1995), Ernest Boyer (1990), Sandra Elman and Sue Smock (1985), and others. As we began working with various institutions we realized that parts of the definition are problematic for some institutions and disciplines. Issues which must be considered in campus discussions of what constitutes faculty professional service include which activities and projects fall under the rubric of faculty professional service, what is possible within the scope of various disciplines, and how faculty are recognized and rewarded — or penalized — for engaging in service. The difficulty is that these conversations often do not result in consensus among the participants. The key is to find a working definition that is good enough to move an institution toward acting on its outreach mission. Each department and unit can, and should continue the conversation.

- Conduct an inventory of outreach efforts on your campus. Be sure to look at both individual and group projects, policies, and structures. Don't be discouraged by the lack of infrastructure and take heart in the numbers of faculty who are engaged in outreach.

When we examined faculty professional service at various colleges and universities in New England we found a considerable level of faculty activity and few structures to support that activity. A common scenario is that the institution's president speaks about the

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importance of outreach work and significant (though largely invisible) numbers of faculty are already involved in outreach involving local schools, community organizations, businesses, and government. However, policies and actions supporting these activities in faculty workloads, or mechanisms to evaluate and reward the service are less common — if not completely absent.

We also thought we might find the model campus — one that

had embraced service as a form of scholarship in obvious ways that could be disseminated broadly. We hoped we might find institutions where the triad of teaching, research, and service was universally supported across all intra-institutional boundaries. Instead we found what we call “faculty service enclaves” (Singleton, Hirsch, and Burack 1997): collectives of faculty who are actively engaged in community outreach. Within service enclaves, individuals operated collaboratively, oriented toward a common project or goal. They shared characteristics

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that enabled them to be effective, vital, and tied to the mission of their institutions. Ultimately, they were much more effective in addressing community and institutional issues as a collective than they were when working individually.

We've come to believe that the enclave model can be a powerful force for grass-roots change — if there are a sufficient number of service enclaves, if they collaborate with other units within the institution, and if they self-consciously are guided by institutional missions. Institutions can move beyond a collection of service enclaves to an integrated conception of faculty work which broadly defines scholarship to include research, teaching, and community-based work. In this way, an institution can move from symbolic expression to active support of public service through institutional structures, policies, and procedures.

The lesson here is that there is probably a large but invisible body of faculty on most campuses who are linking their expertise with the community. If you are thinking about ways to institutionalize faculty service, you are probably not alone, and need not start from scratch. Simply identifying the service enclaves on your campus is one way to start.

- Provide opportunities for faculty to learn how to document and evaluate outreach work as scholarship regardless of whether or not policies and rewards are in place.

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While working with deans, chief academic officers, and department chairs on how to support faculty work in the community, it became evident that many individual faculty needed assistance in how to document and evaluate their own community work as a scholarly activity. Faculty often don't know how to document these activities in ways that could pass muster in their institutional evaluation systems. The Portfolio Project, under the leadership of the late Ernest Lynton and Amy Driscoll, was created to address issues associated with documenting service. Teams of four faculty members from four different institutions created service portfolios that made their service work visible and accessible to peer review, which enhanced colleagues' awareness (Driscoll and Lynton 1997). A framework was developed emphasizing the service project's purpose and rationale, goals, process and methodology, and outcomes.

The lesson is that merely changing the rules is not enough. Faculty who have not done this kind of work, or who have been working in isolation may need help in formulating it as a scholarly activity accessible to their peers.

- Provide help for faculty who need assistance in developing expertise in service and outreach work.

NERCHE designed Project Colleague to work on developing faculty skills for engaging in community-based work. This became especially crucial for faculty dealing with sensitive issues and the equally sensitive communities and organizations with whom they were working. From seven institutions we assembled ten Faculty Associates who were respected by their colleagues, had long-standing community projects, were recognized for their expertise in this area,

and were interested in communicating their knowledge to others. These Faculty Associates were to be the core of Project Colleague's "train-the-trainers" model.

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We discovered that Faculty Associates knew more than they thought they knew about institutional politics, and how to work effectively, build support, attract and retain people, work with community groups, etc. However, they did not credit what they knew as *real knowledge*. As one associate stated, "Here I am, being asked to help

people do things, [and] I have no clear idea how to do myself. Who am I to say to respected colleagues that this is how you do it?"

We helped associates to analyze and reflect on what they knew by presenting models of change in organizations; sharing readings about service, the civic role of higher education, and the role of community organizers; and providing support for the translation of what they knew into exercises, case studies, and reflective essays.

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We changed the design of Project Colleague from one which brought in "experts" to teach specific skills to a grass-roots, peer-to-peer model. The lesson from this project is that faculty experienced in professional service have much to share with their colleagues. If institutionalizing service is a goal, it is worth identifying these faculty on your campus, and providing them with the resources necessary to reflect on and articulate what they do.

- Think about how to incorporate the voice of the community into your outreach activities.

Where can the community have a voice? As Kupiec (1993) notes, "good service projects do not happen without community input; the power and right to determine needs, priorities and capacities lies with the community" (113). University-community collaborations also affect a range of institutional issues, such as academic freedom, intellectual property, confidentiality, and protocols relating to human subjects. These challenges should not be ignored or administratively regulated. Instead, encourage debates about this type of faculty work in administrative halls, faculty offices and classrooms (Ansley and Gaventa, 1997).

Our experience in all of our projects has demonstrated that a host of complex issues will arise from working with a community partner. You won't be able to anticipate all of the issues, but if you can be strategic in planning for community input, you will be more certain to maximize institutional and community efforts and rewards.

- It takes time to arrive at a deeper understanding of the myriad levels and issues that arise when institutionalizing service. Changing institutional cultures with regard to service can appear to be an impossible task, but — like many insitutional change endeavors — it can occur, provided its supporters have patience and are persistent.

We started out thinking that a single project could tackle changing institutional cultures. The development of the Project on Faulty Professional Service into a program composed of three projects was directly related to the complexity and difficulty of creating change in most colleges and universities. Though we knew that service is marginalized on most campuses, efforts to make it more "mainstream" open a Pandora's box of issues regarding the nature of scholarship, faculty work loads, forms of pedagogy, reward systems, town/gown relations, institutional missions, and departmental decision-making, to name a few.

Change in any institution is a gradual process, and there is no recipe for making faculty professional service a more significant priority in colleges and universities. The work of the academy is mediated through a variety of different institutional cultures, from traditional liberal arts colleges to research institutions to urban comprehensives. While these cultures are not immutable, they do respond to change in ways that reflect their values and beliefs.

Attempting to change campuses by presidential decrees that have little meaning or importance to members of the campus is likely to be met with indifference, at best. A culture that embraces service cannot be imposed, but can happen gradually and incrementally. By understanding the power of faculty service enclaves, creating a framework for documenting service, and assisting faculty in developing the skills necessary to do community work, we believe it is possible to move an institution toward an integrated conception of scholarship that includes service. ■

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## About the Author

Catherine A. Burack (Ed.D., Harvard University) is Project Director of the Program on Faculty Professional Service and Academic Outreach at the New England Resource Center for Higher Education. Under her direction the program assists colleges and universities to develop policies and structures that support faculty service and helps faculty link scholarship with service and develop the skills to support successful collaborative community projects. She also coordinates the Think Tank for Chief Academic Officers from colleges and universities in Maine and New Hampshire. The focus of the think tank is to develop ways to institutionalize faculty service and student service learning.