



Outreach, Engagement Will Keep Academia Relevant to Twenty-First Century Societies

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There is no doubt in my mind that public service and outreach will be hallmarks of the university of the future. Indeed, they will be of prime importance in the ability of institutions of higher education to sustain themselves and perpetuate the values embedded within their founding missions. At the heart of this will be the involvement of our faculty through their teaching, research, and service.

This essay discusses the emerging trends in service and outreach, the plans and programs underway at Ohio State to ensure that service and outreach remain central to what we do, and what I see as some key issues involving faculty involvement in service and outreach activities.

Public service and outreach have long been driving forces in the nation's land-grant institutions. During the 1990s, additional considerations — among them intensified global competition,

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technological advances, challenges of varying merit to the relevance of higher education, and fluctuations in financial support of higher education — have given service and outreach an increasing prominence as we have worked to find even more relevant ways to meet the needs of and connect with our constituencies while honoring our commitment to academic excellence.

This prompted the Kellogg Commission (1999) to suggest that we go beyond service and outreach to "engagement," a process by which we might become even more systematically and productively involved with our communities: engagement goes well beyond extension, conventional outreach, and even most conceptions of public service. Inherited concepts emphasize a one-way process in which the university transfers its expertise to key constituents.

Embedded in the engagement ideal is a commitment to sharing and reciprocity — two-way streets defined by mutual respect among the partners for what each brings to the table.

It is useful and instructive for us to note that the concept of outreach and engagement also has emerged as a powerful dynamic in the non-educational sector as well. Harvard Professor Michael Porter suggests (Harvard Business Review 1998) that economic vitality in the twenty-first century will depend upon the use of geographic concentrations of interconnected companies and institutions — concentrations he calls “clusters.” The benefits of such vitality will accrue not only to companies and communities, but also in very real ways to institutions of higher education, Porter writes. Executives must extend their thinking beyond what goes on inside their own organizations and within their own industries: Leaders of businesses, government, and institutions all have a stake and a role to play in the new economics of competition. Clusters reveal the mutual dependence and collective responsibility of all these entities for creating the conditions for productive competition. This task will require fresh thinking on the part of leaders and the willingness to abandon the traditional categories that drive our thinking about who does what in the economy.

The benefits of fresh thinking are, I believe, at least as promising in higher education as they are in the business sector, and Porter’s observations suggest there are synergies which can be created or encouraged with those outside the academy which hold the potential of benefiting all participants. This emphasis has been given new energy upon the arrival of President William Kirwan who has made outreach and engagement a top university priority.

Whether we reap these benefits will depend in large part on our ability to recognize and respond to a number of emerging trends in public service, outreach, and engagement. Among these trends are:

- The appropriateness and utility of greater community partnerships in which the resources of a wide array of social assets are brought to bear on an issue, much as Porter calls for the creation of clusters for economic and business vitality.
- The value, indeed, the necessity of interdisciplinary collaborations to address increasingly complex issues facing society.
- The value of increased service learning opportunities for both students and the community.
- The rapid growth in technological capabilities not only to transmit the knowledge created in research environments but also to overcome time and place limitations that sometimes inhibit the learning process in other contexts.
- The desire throughout society to focus resources in efficient and effective ways on K-12 education and, ultimately, K-Life.
- The call for the restructuring of higher education to meet the changing needs of society.

Ohio State is actively involved in a number of efforts to build partnerships within the community. Our “Campus Partners” initiative

is a non-profit community development corporation that unites business leaders, city officials, schools, neighborhood residents, students, faculty, and staff in efforts to improve the quality of life in the university area. Ohio State has committed more than \$28 million to the effort. Campus Partners, chaired by David Williams, vice president for Student and Urban/Community Affairs, in broad consultation with the community and the university, created a revitalization plan and identified priority projects from among the plan's recommendations to remedy long-standing problems of deteriorated housing, low levels of homeownership, and a declining retail base. These projects also work with the city to improve public infrastructure, safety, trash collection and code enforcement, and with the community to improve elementary and secondary education, job readiness and economic development. Campus Partners initiatives are leading to substantive private investment in both the housing and retail-commercial markets in the University District, while maintaining the ethnic and economic diversity of its people. Ohio State's involvement represents a new focus for the university as a center for learning and service on urban issues.

The "Campus Collaborative" is an interprofessional group that links thirty-five university units and several community organizations to focus the university's academic and human resources in the neighborhoods east of our Columbus campus. The Campus Collaborative received a \$400,000 grant from the Department of Housing and Urban Development which will provide support for many of the human service, education, health, and economic development programs the collaborative has developed through its work with Campus Partners. Additionally, the Office of Academic Affairs funds an annual \$100,000 seed grant program. The awards are given to faculty and staff at Ohio State to carry out their academic work in adjoining neighborhoods.

"OSU CARES" (Community Access to Resources and Education Services) is a jointly funded effort of the Office of the President and Ohio State University Extension which serves as a catalyst to activate teams of university professionals to address anticipated critical issues facing Ohioans. Through the funding of interdisciplinary university teams, thirteen of Ohio State's colleges have participated in seed grants supporting networking and outreach/engagement. OSU CARES is working with the new outreach/engagement efforts of colleges across the university to partner these initiatives with the OSU Extension's delivery system.

In addition to these efforts, we are extending the university to people throughout Columbus and the state via OSU Extension and other outreach efforts. Interdisciplinary collaborations are embedded in virtually all of our outreach initiatives, most notably OSU Cares, Campus Collaborative, and OSU Extension; and grant opportunities exist through the President's Council for Outreach and Engagement which brings together faculty and staff from across the university.

One highly successful and high-profile activity is our "Roads Scholars Tour." Each year, groups of faculty, students, and administrators from many areas of campus spend several days on bus tours of Ohio, meeting with citizens, prospective students, business leaders, and faculty from other institutions to gain a better insight into the needs of the people of Ohio and the ways that Ohio State may better meet those needs.

In addition, we sponsor multiple activities on campus, such as regular roundtable lunches, that provide opportunities for faculty to share ideas and explore interdisciplinary possibilities.

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Service learning also offers many opportunities for our students to contribute to society and get important "real-world" experience while working under the guidance of faculty. We are encouraging dialogue among faculty who are engaged in service learning and are creating guidelines for changes in curricula that will promote the growth of this activity. I also have appointed a campus-wide committee to explore service learning's full potential.

Technological advances offer truly revolutionary opportunities and pose significant challenges for institutions of higher education. Our abilities to engage in collaboration with scholars and researchers around the world expand on a daily basis. Partnerships with businesses and non-profit and government organizations are virtually limitless, and while they hold the promise of great benefit to us they also tax our abilities to remain focused on core academic priorities.

One of the ways we are channeling our resources and focusing our energies is through our Science and Technology Campus (STC) we created to facilitate the transfer of faculty research into the private sector. The STC affords new businesses the opportunity to work in close proximity with faculty researchers and to create an environment conducive to entrepreneurial risk-taking that is such an important component of high-tech start-up businesses. The STC also offers an opportunity for our students to be employed as part-time workers and to engage in internships in cutting-edge endeavors.

We are also focusing our efforts through a Technology Enhanced Learning and Research (TELRL) plan on affording faculty the opportunity to learn from one another as they approach distance-learning related activities. We are collecting centrally resource information on curriculum design and educational practices which can be used by faculty and academic units as they move into this exciting new area. We have created a new position of university chief information officer with the intent of fully integrating TELRL with other related activities and programs.

With the full backing of the Ohio Board of Regents and the state's top elected leaders, we are encouraging many academic disciplines to partner with elementary and secondary schools in Ohio and beyond to enhance educational programs, support the classroom teacher, and work with administrators as they face increasingly complex issues and deliberations. These activities also offer excellent opportunities for faculty and students from many disciplines to acquire additional first-hand experience.

Finally, we are working to identify ways we might structure ourselves in order to become more responsive to the needs of society. We have created the President's Council for Outreach and Engagement and the Outreach and Engagement Steering Committee to provide university-wide leadership and coordination in this regard.

What I have described thus far is a general discussion of some of the activities underway at Ohio State in order to maximize the benefits to the university and the community beyond our campus of certain outreach and engagement activities. We are very excited about them and how they help strengthen our educational programs, make Ohio State more meaningful to Ohioans, and, thereby, help build citizen trust and confidence in us.

There are several issues concerning faculty involvement in public service and outreach that we have identified and which I will discuss here.

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The first issue for my colleagues and I was to develop a clear sense of what outreach and engagement mean to us. We adopted a definition that is appropriate to us: outreach/engagement is a meaningful and mutually beneficial collaboration with partners in education, business, public and social service. It represents that aspect of teaching that enables learning beyond the campus walls, that aspect of research that makes

what we discover useful beyond the academic community, and that aspect of service that directly benefits the public.

This definition has been extremely helpful as we pursue the mandates of our land-grant mission and as we go about our daily activities as faculty and staff. It helps us embrace outreach and engagement within the culture of the university.

Another crucial consideration is how well our faculty reward system encourages faculty involvement in outreach and engagement activities. While we can provide opportunities for faculty to become involved — through such things as the President's Council for Outreach and Engagement, the Roads Scholars tours, forums, conferences, etc. — it is essential that the promotion and tenure process give appropriate weight to outreach and engagement activities. Because these activities differ across disciplines, and because department chairs and deans must ensure the proper

balance among faculty of research, teaching, and service, we have changed our promotion and tenure guidelines in order to allow academic units to have more latitude in defining both the nature and relative significance of teaching, research, and service in the P&T process. Academic units are now being encouraged to fully implement these guidelines.

Funding is another important consideration as outreach and engagement must compete with other worthy activities for university resources. The outreach and engagement budget has slowly increased from support for an ad hoc committee to the current council staffed by two part-time employees. The council has also been provided \$50,000 to be used for grants. I have asked Dr. Bob Moser, dean of our College of Food, Agricultural and Environmental Sciences and vice president for Agricultural Administration, who is heading up our outreach and engagement efforts, to prepare outreach and engagement proposals for consideration for funding as part of this year's budget process, and to lead an effort to draft an outreach and engagement component to the University Academic Plan. We intend to ensure that our efforts enjoy continued momentum.

The final issue I wish to mention is the question of whether the outreach and engagement mission is in conflict with our research mission in competing for human and financial resources. We believe not; we believe, in fact, that they are complementary components of our land-grant mission which can serve to strengthen each other in multiple ways. More conversation among colleagues and more effective and widespread communication is needed to illustrate the complementarity, and we're committed to undertaking these efforts.

I am convinced that public outreach and engagement is one very important way that institutions of higher education will retain the position of relevance and importance to American society they currently enjoy. Ours will be an increasingly interactive future, one in which we must be flexible and nimble in meeting the needs and expectations of our many constituencies. Those of us who have dedicated our lives to learning still have much to learn — and that is both the challenge and the very exciting prospect that outreach and engagement affords us. ■

References

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- Porter, M. 1998. Clusters and the new economics of competition. *Harvard Business Review*, November-December, 1998: 90.

Author's Notes

For more information on the various programs described throughout this essay, please refer to the following web sites: <http://www.osu.edu/campuscollab/>; www.osu.edu/org/osucp/F/; www.hcs.ohio-state.edu/faes/pr/OSUcares.html; HYPERLINK <http://www.ag.ohio-state.edu/~engage/road/index.html>; www.ag.ohio-state.edu/~engage/road/index.html; <http://www.ag.ohio-state.edu/~engage/road/index.html>;

research.rf.ohio-state.edu/scitech.html; www-best.uts.ohio-state.edu/best_practices/; www.oaa.admin.ohio-state.edu/Handbook/INDEX.html
For more information about the President's Council for Outreach and Engagement, see: www.ag.ohio-state.edu/~engage/

About the Author

Edward J. Ray (Ph.D., Stanford University) received his undergraduate bachelor of art's degree in mathematics from Queens College (CUNY) in June 1966, graduating cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa. He earned his master of art's degree in economics from Stanford University in 1969 and his doctorate in economics from Stanford University in June 1971.

Ray has been a member of the economics faculty at The Ohio State University since 1970 and is currently professor of Economics and executive vice president and provost. He served as department chairperson from 1976 to 1992, and received the University Distinguished Chairperson Award in 1989. Ray served as an associate provost from May 1992 until May 1993, senior vice provost and chief information officer from 1993-1998 and acting and then interim senior vice president and provost between December 1997-December 1998.

Ray's research interests include the history of protectionism in the United States, the determinants of U.S. foreign direct investment and foreign direct investment in the United States and the structure of tariff and nontariff trade barriers in the United States and abroad. They also include the role of financial reform in economic development, the adoption of the income tax in the United States and the rise in military and veterans pension spending and the adoption of social security in the U.S. His research has been published in a number of leading economics journals, including: *The American Economic Review*, *The Journal of Political Economy*, *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, *The Review of Economic Studies*, *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, *The Journal of Law and Economics*, and *The Journal of Economic History*. Ray is co-author of a principles text. His book titled *U. S. Protectionism and the World Debt Crisis* was published by Quorem Press in 1989.

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