



## **Strengthening Institutional Engagement: Addressing Faculty Issues to Facilitate Change**

Marvin S. Keener  
Executive Vice President  
Oklahoma State University

By engagement we refer to institutions that have redesigned their teaching, research, extension and service functions to become even more sympathetically and productively involved with their communities, however community may be defined. Engagement goes well beyond... 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... partnerships, two-way streets defined by mutual respect among partners for what each brings to the table.

*(Report from the Kellogg Commission  
on the Future of the State and Land-Grant Universities.)*

### **Beyond Boundaries and Traditions**

**N**early thirty years ago I came to Oklahoma State University (OSU) with great expectations for a life of the mind. I would teach classes and change the lives of students. I would write scholarly papers and perhaps books that would add knowledge and insight to the discipline of mathematics. I would have discussions

---

**"My job is to protect the  
faculty from the harassment  
of the public" was not  
an uncommon theme  
heard from various  
administrators in those early  
years.**

---

and interact with my colleagues to assess new and exciting avenues of thought in philosophy, the arts, the sciences, and other disciplines represented within the university community. And I certainly did not need any help from someone outside the university community to

guide me! I was not much different from most of my colleagues in this respect, most of whom were similarly engaged with the life of

the mind. We had many role models from graduate school to follow and we were quite well educated as to the role of faculty members. "My job is to protect the faculty from the harassment of the public" was not an uncommon theme heard from various administrators in those early years. The opening statement from the Kellogg Commission was so far from my thinking and understanding at that time as to be nonsensical.

I do not want to convey that OSU did not value outreach activities. The university has and still has an extensive cooperative extension program and each college has an extension office. But for most of the university, faculty were not expected to engage in interaction with communities outside the university. Those individuals who participated in activities for off-campus publics often found that such activities were not valued by their colleagues at promotion and tenure time. Such work was considered "overload" for which one should rightfully be rewarded with "overload pay" instead of career advancement.

This essay highlights the progress OSU has made toward becoming an "engaged institution" and discusses some of the pressing faculty issues that we must address. The mindset illustrated above is multi-dimensional with many facets. The game is

---

**...[W]hat are  
the mechanisms  
and structures  
that facilitate  
faculty  
interaction  
with outside  
constituencies?**

---

to discover and preserve the strengths and worthy traditions while breaking down the barriers that prevent the transformation to the engaged institution. The critical issues at OSU center on the development of a faculty recognition and reward system that reflects the full three-part mission of a land-grant university. Embedded in these issues is the allocation of faculty time and effort that reflects expectations and assessment measures. Also related are funding and organizational implications for planning and institutional decision making that is critical if outreach becomes part of the faculty assignment. The issue can be formulated by asking what are the mechanisms and structures that facilitate faculty interaction with outside constituencies?

Addressing these critical issues at every level of the institution will help OSU elevate outreach to an institutional priority equivalent to that enjoyed by teaching and research. Both the success and the identification of work yet to be done are the result of efforts at all levels. OSU desires to create an environment that fosters faculty, staff, and administrators working with external stakeholders to meet community needs and overcome internal and external barriers.

### **Benchmarks and Best Practices**

Adaptation and changes in the OSU outreach program were made easier because of the many models and sources of information that we found for initiating change and engaging the faculty. The Kellogg

Commission (1999) study encouraged its members to serve as case studies for redefining outreach. Several of the participating institutions, such as the University of Illinois, Iowa State University, Penn State University, and Ohio State University, influenced the changes we made. Michigan State University and Oregon State University continue to influence our efforts to change the faculty recognition and reward system. In March 1999, two leaders from Oregon State University spent time on campus to discuss their experiences. After a general faculty meeting, one of our leading scholars stated that the meeting was "fun" and characterized it as long overdue. We now have a group of faculty leading a campus-wide discussion of the meaning of scholarship as it applies to OSU. The Kellogg Commission report also reminded me of the 1996 inaugural edition of this journal and the challenges and trends identified by national leaders of the movement to refine outreach, now referred to as engagement in the Kellogg Commission report. The information in these articles, plus the Carnegie Foundation books, *Scholarship Reconsidered* (Boyer 1990) and *Scholarship Assessed* (Glassick, Huber, and Maeroff 1996), and Eugene Rice's monograph from the American Association of Higher Education on *The New American Scholar* (1996), have all influenced the changes sweeping higher education and specifically, OSU.

The late Dr. Ernest Boyer (1990) reminded us that the responsibilities of teaching, research, and outreach were not separate functions or silos. Instead, Boyer proposed that higher education had an obligation to redefine the professorate into four essential, interlocking functions: the scholarship of discovery, integration, sharing knowledge, and application of knowledge. He challenges our campuses to be a staging ground for action. The College of Human Environmental Sciences has taken this advice literally and formulated a faculty development program called the Faculty Scholars Program. The yearlong program provides faculty with the tools and information needed to be successful at OSU. It has proved very successful in increasing faculty productivity in all areas, including outreach. But most importantly, it has assisted faculty in integrating the three-part mission of the University into their professional development.

### The OSU Culture and Organization

Before indicating how OSU has tried to address the critical issues, it is necessary to explain how the outreach program is organized at the university. Basically, OSU has two separate units dedicated to outreach. The first and oldest arm is the Cooperative Extension Service, which is administered by the dean of the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources. The dean also administers the Agricultural Experiment Station; all three units are called the Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources. In many ways the division represents an ideal model for the integration of the intellectual resources of the university to collaboratively solve problems facing the agricultural community. Indeed, faculty

members in the division have appointments that explicitly state their assignments relative to three different budgets. The primary problem facing the unit is the benign neglect strategy that the federal government employs to shift the burden of expense to the states. How well the states respond to this challenge will determine in large measure how long the Cooperative Extension Service will continue to be viable in its current state.

The second arm for outreach at OSU, University Extension, has an administrative structure quite different from those found at most universities. Each of the five other colleges with undergraduate and graduate programs have outreach units housed in the college and administered by the dean of the college, but with a dual report to the dean of University Extension, International and Economic Development (UEIED). This administrative arrangement has provided OSU certain opportunities that it could not otherwise achieve easily, but it also presents some challenges. The outreach offices are close to the faculty and the staff is familiar with mission and direction of the college and departments. In this sense these units have the advantage that Cooperative Extension has for the utilization of the faculty rather than depending on adjunct faculty for successful programs. Furthermore, each college dean is supportive of the outreach efforts, specifically in leadership and financing. Virtually all outreach programs are in keeping with the goals, objectives, and expertise of the faculty of the college. The decentralized nature of the organization sometimes becomes a liability because of the duplication of certain support and tracking services and supporting multidisciplinary activities across colleges. The reward system for faculty, however, is radically different between colleges.

Whereas the Cooperative Extension Service enjoys funding allocations from federal, state, and county government, University Extension receives only a state allocation to facilitate growth and development. The state allocation for the university is based solely on the production of student credit hours and, therefore, University Extension is necessarily at a disadvantage in the funding formula used by state government. The funding University Extension receives, however, provides for staff support in each college to do market analysis, program development, program facilitation, and delivery. Faculty members who choose to participate in outreach programs are paid on an overload basis because very few faculty have explicit outreach assignments. Revenues generated by outreach activities are used to pay the faculty and to meet other programmatic expenses. The total University Extension program receives \$3 million of state funding, from which approximately one-hundred and fifty FTE staff in conjunction with our faculty produce 2,500 program activities, serve 100,000 citizens, and generate \$30 million in revenue.

### Addressing the Challenges and Faculty Issues

To bring the faculty into a new mindset regarding the value and importance of an integrated relationship between instruction,

research, and outreach is not easy. Faculty are creative, independent, and bright individuals. They respond to stimuli they understand and value, especially if they believe that their colleagues and administrators share the same values. We have taken some steps centrally to illustrate the value of becoming an engaged university. First, we restructured University Extension to report to the chief academic officer of the university rather than to the Office of Business and Finance. Thus we said that outreach activity is an academic matter, not an auxiliary enterprise separated from research

---

**[Faculty] respond  
to stimuli they  
understand and value,  
especially if they  
believe that their  
colleagues  
and administrators  
share the same values.**

---

and instruction. Second, we augmented the budget process to include a review of college outreach activities. Each dean must account for the progress in public service activities and meeting the needs of the citizens of the state. The budget implications of outreach are examined in a manner similar to research and instruction. Each dean has discovered faculty within their college who have special

talents for communicating with the public just as there are faculty who are especially gifted in the areas of instruction and research activities. These simple administrative changes are making a difference in changing the environment. Because of the positive implications for the university, we are grappling more determinedly with the issue of faculty rewards.

As a result of these changes we discovered that outreach was not as easily categorized and measured as instruction and research. Outreach crosses some of the traditional boundaries and requires a refinement in our understanding of what the university does and how we communicate with the public. Without re-examining our current operations, it is unclear how to provide a structure that facilitates the interaction between the general public and the faculty. The best illustration of the issue came to me on a visit in southeast Oklahoma. The owner of a medium size manufacturing company asked me if anyone at OSU could help him solve a particular problem. I returned to OSU and called the dean of Engineering. He contacted the individual, and eventually got the correct faculty member to assess the problem. The result was that a solution was provided and a graduate student got a master's thesis out of the deal as well. Three things struck me: 1) the owner was not sure that the university could help him; 2) a long time passed between the time the owner told the university that he needed some help and the time help began; and 3) if the company had been large enough, the owner would be on a first name basis with the dean and would have contacted the college directly.

To respond to this issue, we reviewed how OSU communicates with the public. We surveyed about eighty percent of the land-grant

universities and discovered we were doing what most universities did in reporting services to the public, specifically in categories such as traditional credit, noncredit, and professional development. We decided that a new way of communicating was needed. We inventoried all of our activities that involved significant interaction with audiences outside the university. These included not only those activities conducted through the college outreach offices, but also those that may have been in the traditional silos of research and

---

**We inventoried all  
of our activities that  
involved significant  
interaction  
with audiences outside  
the university.**

---

instruction. We discovered more than two-hundred programs, organizations, units, and other activities that involved about forty percent of the faculty! We then conducted a content analysis to identify categories of services and to whom these services were provided. We now have an outreach grid consisting of five categories of services

(degrees and certificates, workforce development, technology transfer and assistance, public information dissemination, and community enrichment) and four categories of audiences (individuals, businesses and industry, educational institutions, and government). We currently have a research team testing and validating our finding in Tulsa and Oklahoma City. The first outreach magazine has just been released to market test the outreach grid approach to communicating these capabilities and case studies. Final results of this effort are expected in July, but initial indications are very positive.

With new ways of measuring success, a mechanism to foster interaction with the faculty was needed. Our inventory indicated that our faculty are interested, willing, and able, but we must make it reasonably easy for appropriate linkages to develop between the faculty and the public. A single point of contact, i.e., a gateway to the university, is under development that the public can understand and easily use. We have relocated and expanded the authority of the dean of UEIED and his staff to include a conference center and enough space to house college representatives in one location. A toll free number is widely advertised and the public is encouraged to call with any question or request for assistance. Because each college has personnel on site and is linked to the college offices, which in turn are familiar with the expertise and interest of the faculty, we can provide quick responses to most requests. Yes, we get the usual weird questions, but the system basically works well. I am very encouraged by the success thus far, and I believe the value of this system to the state will improve markedly. Equally important, the public will comprehend the value of their university in a more personal way.

To be a fully engaged university, however, the faculty must embrace a new mind set. Faculty recognition and reward translates

to standards for promotion and tenure as well as salary adjustments. In most institutions, promotion and tenure decisions are initiated at the departmental level with approvals sought throughout the various levels of administration. Therefore, it is essential that outreach activities are valued at the department level to preserve the ideals of shared governance and responsible leadership. As I indicated earlier, we have initiated, with the approval of the Faculty Council, a discussion about scholarship along the lines outlined by Boyer and following the guidance of institutions such as Iowa State and Oregon State. The discussion is faculty driven with leadership from a select group of respected faculty. At present the results of this process is not clear, but a campus-wide discussion is a step forward. The prevailing view remains that activities that qualify as outreach are basically not part of a faculty member's assignment and, therefore, the only reward one should expect is overload pay. The transition to a different set of values is not easy for anyone. A number of special meetings with the college deans have identified the financial, historical, and cultural barriers to the transition. Whereas these discussions are enlightening, they are difficult and to date we have not reached a shared perspective.

## Conclusion

Oklahoma State University has made some major efforts at becoming an engaged university in the sense expressed by the Kellogg report. Most of our success has been in creating administrative structures that can better promote the ideals that will benefit the state and region in which we are located. Whereas we still have much to achieve, we are not discouraged. Indeed, at one time in our history, research/scholarship took a backseat to the instructional mission of the University. High teaching loads were an impediment to the development of excellent research programs. This changed through the natural process of developing the faculty, but it took time to realize the value of research to the instructional programs and the development of graduate education, and also to the residents of the state.

Perhaps we could learn a lesson from that transition. A key element in the transition to a research university was redefining the workload of faculty. In simplistic terms, workload is measured in terms of credit hours taught with reductions given for scholarship. Scholarship, though, is usually thought of only in terms of the creation of new knowledge while outreach is associated with overload payments. I argue that a great deal of our outreach has a scholarship component. What is needed is a peer review system similar to that which research productivity enjoys. Such a system would serve as a validation that the product met certain standards deemed of value. Such standards should have an element of creativity embedded in them. For research we often ask: Does the paper contain information that is new, true, and interesting to professionals in the field of inquiry? Perhaps for outreach we should ask: Is the product new, true, and useful to the intended audience?

The research function also enjoys accepted national standards for accessing the research output of universities. While I am not suggesting that I concur with the standards set by the Carnegie Foundation in their rating system, it does represent a set of standards that are accepted by the faculty. Does creating some analog set of standards for outreach have value? An institution might strive to attain the status of, say a Kellogg I Engaged Institution, by representing the best practices of engagement. For a variety of reasons, I am not keen on the idea of yet another rating system. Nevertheless, the existence of such standards would provide a legitimate foundation for national recognition. Presently, excellence in outreach is communicated more by word of mouth than by objective evaluation.

I look forward to the continued development of our outreach role. Considering our past accomplishments, we have reason to believe that the future will be bright. While we don't have all the answers, we have a faculty and staff who are talented and creative. With guidance, that is usually enough. ■

#### References

- Boyer, E. L. 1990. *Scholarship reconsidered: Priorities of the professorate*. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. Lawrenceville, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Boyer, E. L. 1996. The scholarship of engagement. *Journal of Public Service & Outreach*. 1(1): 11-20.
- Driscoll, A., & E.A. Lynton. 1999. Making outreach visible: A guide to documenting professional service and outreach. Washington, D.C.: American Association for Higher Education.
- Glassick, C. E., M.T. Huber, & G.I. Maeroff. 1997. *Scholarship assessed: Evaluation of the professorate*. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities. 1999. *Returning to our roots: the engaged institution* (Third Report). Washington, D.C.: National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, Office of Public Affairs.
- Lynton, E. A. 1995. Making the case for professional service. Washington, DC: American Association for Higher Education.
- Rice, R. E. 1996. Making a place for the new American scholar (AAHE Forum on Faculty Roles & Rewards Inquiry #1). Washington, D.C.: American Association for Higher Education.
- Weber, M. J., D. Engle, & P.K. Knaub. 1995. Investment in faculty development pays dividend for higher education. *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences*. Spring, 27-31.
- Votruba, J. C. 1996. Strengthening the university's alignment with society: Challenges and strategies. *Journal of Public Service & Outreach*. 1(1): 29-36.

#### Author's Note

I would also like to acknowledge the assistance of Ms. Debra Engle and Dr. James Hromas for their valuable comments on these issues during the preparation of this essay.

#### About the Author

Marvin S. Keener (Ph.D., University of Missouri-Columbia) is the executive vice president of Oklahoma State University. In this position he is responsible for the instructional, research, and support functions of the university. He joined the OSU faculty in 1970 and currently holds the rank of professor in the Department of Mathematics. During his tenure at the university he has held the administrative positions of department head of Mathematics and associate dean of Academic Affairs in the College of Arts and Sciences. His teaching and research interests are in differential equations and applied mathematics. He received his undergraduate degree from Birmingham-Southern College and his master's and doctoral degrees from the University of Missouri-Columbia.