

The World Grant Ideal and Engagement Scholarship

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Abstract

Michigan State University President Lou Anna Simon's concept of the world grant ideal is grounded in three core values: quality, inclusiveness, and connectivity. These core values fuel the 21st-century imperative to build sustainable global prosperity. They represent an affirmation of the Morrill Act of 1862 in the context of a global society and as a model of university-community collaboration, applicable not only to research-intensive universities but also to higher education in general as well as to a broad range of societal organizations. In this essay, the authors describe the core features of a world grant ideal, provide examples of how Michigan State University has applied the three core values, and draw attention to critical organizational alignments that must occur in order to support fully engaged higher education institutions.

Introduction

In 1855 the State of Michigan established the Agricultural College of Michigan as a state land-grant college. That same year, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania established the Farmers' High School as a similar institution. Known today as Michigan State University and The Pennsylvania State University respectively, each state's land-grant institution later became part of a land-grant system that was enacted via passage of the federal Morrill Act of 1862. Since it was founded, Michigan State University has consistently and successfully embodied an educational tradition in which vision and values drive behavior. In 1855, the vision of a more widely educated public able to explore, understand, and apply the scientific and industrial concepts reshaping 19th-century society led to a founding class of students not normally considered "appropriate candidates" for higher education, predominantly due to family occupation and socioeconomic status. Revolutionary at the time, this vision came to fruition because of the ideals at the democratic foundation of land-grant universities, including ideals that required land-grant universities to seek and continually renew the highest quality research and education in every academic discipline; ideals that called on the land-grant universities to make knowledge accessible to all who desired to embrace and use it to

advance themselves and the society in which they lived; ideals about the connectivity of the professional and the liberal, the practical and the theoretical, the arts and the sciences; and ideals that recognized the need to apply knowledge-based solutions to societal challenges, requiring that researchers work with people outside academia as partners with as much to offer as to learn. Integrated to fuel the production of cutting-edge knowledge and make it useful for individuals and communities, these ideals sparked and sustained the real-life, problem-based inquiries and approaches to knowledge-based answers that have made land-grant universities so highly regarded today.

Thus, since their beginning, land-grant universities have made outreach to the public, based on research findings and knowledge expertise, central to their missions and values. In the early years, public outreach focused predominantly on agriculture and manufacturing in a university's surrounding communities and state. Achieving improved agricultural yields, developing more pest-resistant fruits and vegetables, and helping small businesses were typical goals in the early days of land-grant colleges throughout the United States. This work was successful, ultimately contributing to the nation's transition into the industrial age, and transforming its economy.

The purpose of this essay is not to review the historical origins or development of land-grant universities; many others have chronicled this history (*Bonnen, 1998; Cross, 2012; Enarson, 1992; Johnson, 1981*). Rather, it is to draw attention to land-grant universities in the context of 21st-century needs. The world is profoundly different from past centuries with respect to the size and urbanization of its population; technology-driven access to and dissemination of knowledge; the extent of racial and social disparities, and challenges to global health; and the sustainability of the planet's natural resources upon which the world's population is critically dependent.

From Land Grant to World Grant

Simon (2009) refers to the paradigm for adapting the ideals and core values inherent in the land-grant tradition to the challenges of the 21st century as the world grant ideal. The world grant ideal provides a way of understanding how a research-intensive university can adapt to meeting the needs of a changing world while continuing to shape the changes that will be hallmarks of the future. For example, by integrating the ideals of the land-grant tradition

into the strengths of modern society, Michigan State University is successfully applying its core values to 21st-century education and globalization. We, the authors, believe that these ideals and core values mold and make strong Michigan State University's engagement with the world. Even more important, we believe that these ideals and core values, adapted to the strengths of universities of all kinds, create a 21st-century framework for advancing higher education's contributions to the public good (*Boyte & Kari, 1996; Kellogg Commission, 1999*). Further, we believe that these ideals and core values are relevant and powerful for a broad range of organizational types across societal sectors.

The 21st century is, in a word, global. Boundaries and borders—geographical, cultural, financial, and political—that once separated nations and continents have become increasingly permeable, making once-remote geographic and societal cultural issues as common as the local agricultural concerns of the 19th-century. While solutions to specific challenges may be identified and pursued in local, state, or national contexts, ultimately these solutions must become part of a combined effort to address challenges facing humanity in settings throughout the world. The interconnectedness of people and nations requires universities to recognize that no problem has only one definitive answer or one definitive application; rather, solutions must be developed with an eye toward incorporating the knowledge gained in one locale to other locales. Indeed, efforts are under way throughout the world to effect transformational changes in the relationship between higher education and society by building partnerships among four sectors of society (often referred to as the quad helix): higher education, business and industry, government, and civil society (see Table 1). These four sectors provide the individuals and organizations necessary for creating and sustaining systems change efforts across the domains of community and economic life.

Table 1. History of the Development of Organizations Focused on Civic and Community Engagement

| Higher Education Networks: Focus on Civic and Community Engagement | |
|--|------|
| Campus Compact | 1985 |
| New England Resource Center for Higher Education | 1988 |
| Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities | 1990 |
| Corporation for National and Community Service | 1993 |
| HBCU (Historically Black Colleges and Universities) Faculty Development Network | 1994 |
| Community-Campus Partnerships for Health | 1996 |
| Rede Uniraballio | 1996 |
| Engagement Scholarship Consortium | 1999 |
| Living Knowledge: The International Science Shop Network | 1999 |
| Imagining America: Artists and Scholars in Public Life | 1999 |
| Universidad Construye Pais | 2001 |
| Australian Universities Community Engagement Alliance (AUCEA) | 2002 |
| New Eurasia Foundation Community-University Network | 2004 |
| Canadian Alliance for Community Service Learning | 2005 |
| El Centro Latinoamericano de Aprendizaje y Servicio Solidario | 2005 |
| The Talloires Network | 2005 |
| The Research University Civic Engagement Network (TRUCEN) | 2005 |
| International Association for Research on Service-Learning and Community | 2006 |
| Higher Education Network for Community Engagement | 2006 |
| The Coalition of Urban Serving Universities | 2007 |
| Association of Commonwealth Universities Extension Network | 2008 |
| Campus Engage: Network for the promotion of civic engagement in Irish higher education | 2008 |
| Community Based Research Canada | 2008 |
| Global Alliance on Community-Engaged Research | 2008 |
| Ma'an Arab University Alliance for Civic Engagement | 2008 |
| The National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement in Higher Education | 2008 |
| Transformative Regional Engagement Networks | 2008 |
| REDIVU (Ibero-American Volunteer Network for Social Inclusion) | 2010 |
| South African Higher Education Community Engagement Forum | 2010 |
| Networks with a Secondary Focus on Civic and Community Engagement | |
| Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities (formerly NASULGC) | 1887 |
| Association of American Colleges and Universities | 1915 |
| International Association of Universities | 1950 |
| National Association of Universities and Higher Education Institutions | 1950 |
| Association of Colombian Universities | 1957 |
| American Association of State Colleges and Universities | 1961 |
| Association of African Universities | 1967 |
| Global University Network for Innovation | 1999 |
| PASCAL International Observatory | 2002 |

Adapted from Watson, D., Hollister, R. M., Stroud, S. E., & Babcock, E. (2011). The engaged university: International perspectives on civic engagement. New York, NY: Routledge.

With the aim of exploring how the world grant ideal can provide the framework by which all universities can address the pressing societal needs of the nation and the world in the 21st-century, we draw upon Michigan State University's involvement with local and global communities for the betterment of society. We assert that this involvement, referred to as community engagement scholarship (Barker, 2004; Glass & Fitzgerald, 2010; Fitzgerald, Bruns, Sonka, Furco, & Swanson, 2012), reflects the founding ideals and core values of all land-grant universities, defining their philosophy of scholarship, and demonstrating what higher education can accomplish across its diverse areas of expertise. Through the use of examples and specific situations, this essay illustrates how the world grant ideal can work within communities. We demonstrate how a 21st-century framework for advancing higher education's contributions to the public good (Boyte & Kari, 1996) can be established to ensure its viability in neighborhoods and cities, across continents, and into the future (Kellogg Commission, 1999).

Setting the Context: From 19th-Century to 21st-Century Societal Challenges

During the 20th-century, human populations throughout the world migrated to increasingly large and complex urban regional centers; indeed, humanity can now be characterized as an urban species (Birch & Wachter, 2011). Large regional centers currently generate nearly 85% of all jobs, a percentage that will climb rapidly as urban centers continue to grow. Rapid growth without transformational change in education levels, however, comes at a cost. That cost is becoming increasingly visible in the 21st-century. The need for more extensive education, both qualitatively deeper and offered to a larger percentage of the population, becomes more obvious every day.

Population demographers do not generally draw attention to concentrations of poverty and the inability of substantial numbers of urban populations to achieve the quality of life necessary to invigorate society, but these places exist, and the impact of their disadvantages on their own future as well as society's cannot be ignored. At-risk neighborhoods with concentrated poverty, weak social ties, and a poor-to-nonexistent economic base do not have the social or human capital required to bring about transformational change. Other social institutions, usually working in isolation, have not been able to ameliorate these problems.

The same quality partnerships that stimulated agricultural production in the 20th-century must today be marshaled to steward natural resources, build 21st-century knowledge economies, transform transportation, create livable and walkable communities, infuse art and culture into everyday life, and eliminate social and racial inequities. Without these quality partnerships—built on mutual problem-solving definitions, creativity, innovation, and shared commitment—urban communities that should become the center of positive change in the world will instead become centers of stagnancy, with individuals and society suffering the consequences of extensive unemployment (*Bok, 1982; Votruba, 1992*).

Higher education has a critical role to play in addressing all these challenges, and one method for doing so is working in concert with community partners to develop high quality evaluation designs that will produce evidence to inform programs and practices through which the people of these areas can reach their potential and contribute to society and their own well-being (*Ahmed & Palemo, 2010; Leiderman, Furco, Zapf, & Gross, 2002*). Through the core land-grant values of quality, inclusiveness, and connectivity—adapted to 21st-century realities—higher education can engage with 21st-century society for the betterment of individuals, families, communities, and economies into the distant future. These core values are embedded in the foundations of 21st-century engaged scholarship (*Simon, 2009*). They not only shape approaches to engaged scholarship, but also guide the active practice of engaging with individuals and communities to co-create approaches to and solutions for community-defined problems (*Foster-Fishman, Berkowitz, Lounsbury, Jacobson, & Allen, 2001*).

Quality.

The concept of quality seems self-evident, and parts of the concept are (i.e., an institution's commitment to developing to its fullest capacity highly regarded education and research programs across the scientific and humanities disciplines; and creating an atmosphere in which critical thinking, continued learning, and intellectual reach beyond the present are constants). Land-grant universities have proven their ability to conduct quality research and provide quality educational experiences. In the 21st-century, continued quality does not mean abandoning the standards of intellectual and academic rigor. Rather, it means expanding one's understanding of where to seek important questions that, when investigated, promise to inform responses to local and world challenges. Today, world issues and needs are broader and deeper

than they were two centuries ago, and how quality is pursued has changed.

Inclusiveness.

In the 19th-century, the concept of inclusiveness opened U.S. higher education to a broader cross section of society. It also expanded the subject matter taught and researched to include topics that were directly relevant to society. This expanded breadth of inquirers and inquiry forever changed higher education as well as the nation's use of knowledge to impact life and work for the majority of the population. Inclusiveness in the 21st-century not only encompasses the advantages and innovations ushered in at the launching of modern universities, but also includes an acknowledgment of the importance of blending community knowledge with academic expertise in pursuit of solutions to daunting and pervasive societal problems. Twenty-first-century inclusiveness means moving emphasis from first-order change (scaffolding changes in existing programs and practices) to second-order change (innovation and paradigmatic shifts in how things are done; *Foster-Fishman, Nowell, & Yang, 2007*). It means evolving the teaching technique of service-learning from volunteerism to an emphasis on learning and the development of citizen-scholars. It means expanding the definition of access to include opportunities for students to work with community partners so that they better understand the lived experience dimensions of societal problems, and the practices for co-creating solutions (*Adler & Goggin, 2005*). It means university researchers and practitioners working side-by-side with community members to develop innovative and sustainable solutions to societal problems. In short, inclusiveness means that the epistemologies of the past may not be relevant to the solution-focused university-community partnerships needed to address 21st-century societal needs (*Saltmarsh, 2010*).

Connectivity.

In the 19th-century, a university's core value of *connectivity* involved working with the community *outside* the university. Practicing this core value required that all the participants respect and appreciate one another, and recognize the interdependence of research and practice. The great land-grant educational experiment of merging education and community involvement to increase knowledge to benefit humanity expanded this core value. Today, connectivity means more than just working in service to or with

community partners; it means crafting strategies to create and sustain community-based initiatives where none existed or where local history has created impenetrable boundaries to system-access both within communities and within institutions of higher education (Fitzgerald, Allen, & Roberts, 2010; Simon, 1999). In other words, knowing-and-being in higher education has successfully transformed into knowing-and-doing.

Today, synergies across the core values of quality, inclusiveness, and connectivity in the context of the world grant ideal and engaged scholarship serve as a guiding philosophy for framing aspirations—aspirations of universities, individuals, and communities. These aspirations blend traditional paradigms and measures of quality with metrics that reflect the complexities of 21st-century impact and accountability. The metrics of such blending provide evidence not only of traditional public service activities, but also of engagement. Such metrics demand scholarship as an element critical for validating the importance of more than just “doing well” for a community (Fitzgerald et al., 2010; Fitzgerald et al., 2012).

In the 21st century, universities need to recognize their community partners as partners, not just recipients of help (Simpson, 2000). By working in collaboration with a range of partners, university members increase their knowledge and expertise through accepting, listening to, and engaging with community members who are closest to and best informed on the challenges that create barriers to transformative economic and social change in their communities. Community partners may include neighborhood residents, school officials, business leaders, government agents, nonprofit service-providers, health care professionals, local youth groups, or various combinations that reflect components of the quad helix (higher education, business and industry, government, and civil society).

An outsider cannot reasonably and fully understand or construct a change model without adequate input from those seeking guidance or solutions. A university that recognizes and considers itself part of a community—situated in and working with that community—will realize that its partners share in co-creating knowledge and capacities to address what concerns them (Pasque, 2010). Today’s challenge is to expand the past success of university-community partnerships in agriculture and manufacturing to the domains of green energy, educational disparities, agribusiness, advanced manufacturing, health and nutrition, and educational systems. Recognizing knowledge economy requirements and applying innovative thinking and entrepreneurial investment will be essential.

Land-Grant University Responses

As noted by Simon (1999, p. 3), so solid is the philosophy behind the historical successes of land-grant institutions that they “provide the platform, the will, and the incentives of scholars in a research-intensive environment to use their special skills to achieve the powerful relevance to society [now referred to as] engaged scholarship.” Land-grant universities enter this new era with the historical perspective to create new roles in the nature of society for its practical needs (Bonnen, 1998).

Translating Past Successes to Today

In this millennium, members of land-grant universities recognize the complexity of challenges permeating the world. They have expanded the reach of their engagements to encompass scientific concepts and to address societal issues arising from exclusively 21st-century circumstances. The world has changed and requires that land-grant universities become more “world grant” in their ideals and their actions. They must apply their strengths (e.g., agriculture and agribusiness, health and family quality of life, sustainability, and the knowledge economy) to 21st-century challenges.

Applying quality, inclusiveness, and connectivity provides opportunities for higher education to draft its own version of the five C’s of digital inclusion (*Digital Inclusion Panel Report, 2004*): connectivity (access to the Internet), capability (access to skill development), content (culturally appropriate materials), confidence (adult learning, workforce development), and continuity (sustainability of interventions and change models; see Jackson, Fitzgerald, von Eye, Zhao, & Witt, 2010). Each of these digital knowledge economy components has its parallel within the university. For example, in a university context, *connectivity* refers to the relative ease with which faculty and community members can access one another and build partnerships. It means overcoming university and community institutional and cultural barriers that interfere with such efforts.

Capability refers to recognition that skills and knowledge reside in both universities and communities and that faculty must reflect deeply on the epistemological approaches that drive their research and creative activities. Engagement scholarship particularly rejects positivism (Fisher, 2006) and instead links with pluralistic approaches to knowledge that emphasize dynamic systems theory, contextualism, and multiple and evolving theories of change. For example, the University of Salford in the United

Kingdom has integrated Dooyeweerd's (1955) theory of aspects into all of its community activities. The theory of aspects is a comprehensive systems theory that recognizes that any thing (e.g., event, object, entity) has multiple aspects, and that the dominant aspect of interest varies from individual to individual. One member of a community-based initiative may focus primarily on the network of relationships generated by the initiative, another member may focus on the inequalities that exist across constituent members of the network, and yet another may be involved in the initiative only to access a specific community-based program. Achieving a common focus for the overall goal of a community-based initiative will depend in part on how these various aspects or views of the initiative can coalesce around a shared mission. Dooyeweerd's theory is especially aligned with the principle of co-creating solutions in university-community partnerships because it requires generation of a shared narrative to guide work toward ultimately achieving the "big picture" while simultaneously supporting programs and tasks that need to be accomplished in the present.

Content demands that a partnership address issues of racial and social inequity, cultural context, and development of culturally appropriate materials where none currently exist, or where such inequities impede success. *Confidence* challenges traditional approaches to teaching and learning and professional development programs for faculty and academic staff (Powell, 2010) whereas *continuity* draws attention to the ability of faculty and community partners to sustain the many changes that may occur within any sector of the quad helix that composes a partnership, including their co-constructed narratives.

Clearly, to re-create the university, advance its core values, and interconnect with societal partners will require more than just changes from linear to matrix organizational models (Alpert, 1985; Brukardt, Holland, Percy, & Zimpher, 2004). Alpert developed a matrix organizational model for higher education in an effort to identify barriers to reformulating higher education's linear drift toward disciplinary and department autonomous units or silos (Coleman, 1981). Despite such penetrating analyses of higher education, particularly research-intensive universities, the impact of such work has been negligible and university silos have continued to build power structures around increasingly well-defined disciplinary boundaries. However, silos that protect power, vested interests, and the status quo also constrain innovation and creativity within universities as markedly as they do within communities. Interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary teaming, cross-unit appointments, and

multi-college reporting lines are organizational practices designed to eliminate or minimize silos in higher education and to replace linear-matrix models with more dynamic systems models of organizational process (Holland, Powell, Eng, & Drew, 2010). Paradoxically, universities are particularly well-suited to assist dissolution of community silos because universities can be perceived as neutral when mediating resolution of diverse community views. Bursting its historical silos, higher education in the 21st-century must be nimble, responsive to a rapidly changing landscape, armed to solve some of the most difficult challenges in human history, willing to walk into the unknown arm-in-arm with community partners (Furco, 2005; Janke & Colbeck, 2008), and effective in educating its students to be positive change agents of the future.

Higher education scholars have challenged the academy to involve itself in solution-oriented approaches to the 21st-century's greatest challenges (Boyer, 1990, 1996; Lynton & Elman, 1987), including infant mortality, failing schools, youth crime and violence, homelessness, access to health care, regional economic development, urban mobility, and access to higher education. Traditionally, universities have conveyed outreach messages to communities framed as "what we can do to solve your problems," thereby separating the community from the change process. Over the past 25 years, however, many voices have called for universities to engage with society as a partner in solving complex societal challenges (Boyer, 1996; Glass & Fitzgerald, 2010; Martinez-Brawley, 2003), framing such relationships around the question, "how can we solve these problems together?"

Further, penetrating the boundaries that traditionally separated people, expertise, and ideas within academia, and academia from community, creates the potential for these groups to collaborate on "problems that require the tools and knowledge of more than one field of study" (Simon, 2009, p 11). Although the increased abundance of knowledge has led to greater specialization, the world grant ideal calls for new combinations of academic disciplines, and for community partners to contribute their knowledge and experience to attain shared goals; that is, it calls for second-order transformative change in academia, including changes to the criteria used to evaluate faculty performance (e.g., clear goals, adequate preparation, appropriate methods, significant results, effective presentation, reflective critique; Glassick, Huber, & Maeroff, 1997, p. 36).

Michigan State University and the Power of We Consortium

The State of Michigan’s multipurpose collaborative bodies provide a case in point. In 1989, Michigan launched a systems change initiative, and established multipurpose collaborative bodies comprising diverse organizations and entities representative of community diversity as defined at the county level. The idea was to create community-based initiatives focused on sharing resources, developing communication networks, and effectively using county resources to advance quality of life for county residents (*Foster-Fishman, Salem, Allen, & Fahrback, 2001*). For example, one multipurpose collaborative body, the Power of We Consortium, and Michigan State University forged a partnership to link the university’s knowledge capital to the Power of We Consortium’s knowledge capital and strategic goals for community change (*Fitzgerald et al., 2010*). The Power of We Consortium brings together more than 200 community agencies woven into 12 coalitions (a network of networks) to achieve first- and second-order changes that affect six indicator domains of community health and well-being: intellectual and social development, economy, health, safety, environment, and community life (see Figure 1). Across the six domains, 33 indicators are assessed to determine the extent to which Power of We Consortium networks and coalitions can be linked to the selected indicators of system change.

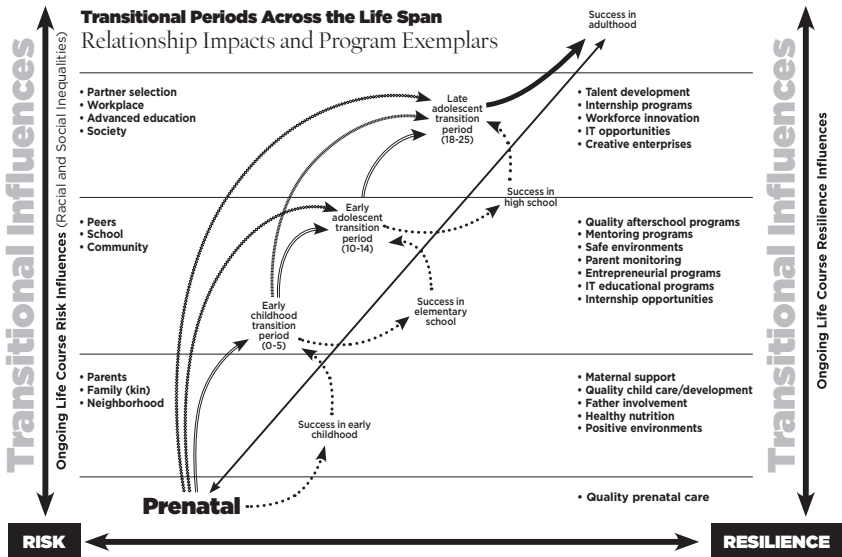


Figure 1. The Infancy to Innovation Framework for systems change. Adapted from Fitzgerald, H. E. (2010). *Birth to work: A community systems framework for systems change. The Engaged Scholar, 5*, 20-21. With permission of Michigan State University, Office of University Outreach and Engagement.

The Power of We Consortium's effectiveness derives from the diversity and inclusiveness of its members. Early on, the consortium recognized the potential for linking outcome categories of system change to its indicators of health and well-being through partnerships with higher education. However, the Power of We Consortium and Michigan State University needed to engage in joint problem solving before measures of system change could be developed and implemented. The partners needed to address how to link multiple and independent programmatic preventive-intervention efforts to population indicators of system change. For example, how does one use outcomes from widely diverse early childhood education programs to predict changes in community-wide indicators of school readiness? Even if it were possible to associate programs to community outcomes directly, what policies would have to be in place to regulate decisions about the allocation of resources to evidence-based programs?

Quite by serendipity, a team of Power of We Consortium and university faculty members found the unifying theme through a risk to resilience framework that provides a vision for building capacity from birth to early adulthood. The framework was developed over several years through a co-creative and dynamic process that focused on building a second-order change model to facilitate development of stronger connections to the diverse evaluation and research capacity of Michigan State University. Brainstorming led to conceptualizing change as requiring a foundation from infancy to adulthood as a way of characterizing the breadth of Power of We Consortium coalitions and agencies. The team conceptualized a birth to work *framework*, which they described in 21st-century terms as the *infancy to innovation* framework for systems change (Fitzgerald, 2010, p. 20).

An infancy to innovation framework.

The infancy to innovation framework illustrated in Figure 1 provides a means for all components of the quad-helix system (higher education, business and industry, government, and civil society) to focus collaboratively on policies and practices that can enhance health and well-being, particularly when well-being includes the production of an educated workforce. It also creates a common vocabulary that is meaningful both to community leaders from many sectors and to faculty members from many disciplines and fields. For example, characterizing three foundational periods as early childhood, middle childhood, and emergent adulthood, although accurate, does not reflect the core social, emotional,

cognitive, and neurobiological changes that thrust individuals on positive life-course pathways or divert them to negative pathways, as reflected by the risk-resilience continuum.

From a systems change perspective, successful life-course pathways are co-constructed by parents, supplemental childcare providers, good schools, safe neighborhoods, concerned neighbors, an engaged business community, and government programs that provide opportunities for children to hone the skills and talents necessary to achieve and maintain positive life-course outcomes. This requires hard work and the willingness of many organizations and specialized networks to seek integration by keeping a collective eye on the children and their families who are targeted beneficiaries of the collective Power of We Consortium effort. The infancy to innovation framework is unique in that it can be applied in any community because it is driven by co-creative processes that enable communities to uniquely determine system change goals and by partnerships necessary to achieve those goals. Moreover, because the infancy to innovation framework is a dynamic systems change model, a constant interplay occurs between proximal (here and now) and distal (past and future) activities and goals. For example, individual, family, and community assets assessed during infancy and early childhood influence proximal activities that are linked to distal big picture goals to be achieved. Because change occurs, the individual, family, and community assets of infancy and early childhood may or may not be relevant as assets for change during middle childhood or adolescence. Thus, systems change models require ongoing reassessment to ensure that the programs and practices generated continue to provide a good fit for the individual or any entity within the evolving system. From Dooyeweerd's (1955) perspective, one has to assess how perceptions of the aspects of things may have changed. The infancy to innovation framework is a generational system change model, and while the end goal may hold, movement through the dynamic system over time will require frequent revisiting of tasks accomplished, assets generated, and innovative practices and entrepreneurial investments required.

Ingredients for Success in University-Community Partnerships

Colleges and universities shape their methods of building community partnerships in ways that are consistent with their missions. For many public and land-grant research universities, scholarship-focused engagement is one such approach (*Fitzgerald et al., 2010*). At Michigan State University, the hallmarks of university-community

partnerships include being embedded in long-standing efforts to identify and to resolve community-defined needs, stressing solutions that are built from community assets, building community capacity for sustainability, facilitating development of collaborative networks (such as the Power of We Consortium), and assessing and benchmarking the outcomes of such partnerships (*Barnes et al., 2009*). Central to each of these aims is the notion that community, however defined, must be part of the co-creative process that underlies any efforts to generate systems change, and that such change must be based on agreed-upon metrics for evaluating change. Co-created metrics with proven success include those generated by community partners (Table 2) and those that have a more institutional focus (e.g., the degree to which projects are collaborative; the extent to which outreach and engagement are understood to address specific societal concerns and geographic areas; shared efforts to generate resources; the degree to which positive sustainable change occurs in the community; the impact on faculty scholarship and student learning; *Church, Zimmerman, Bargerstock, & Kenney, 2003; Lunsford, Bargerstock, & Greasley, 2010; Lunsford, Church, & Zimmerman, 2006*).

Table 2. Ingredients for success in university-community partnerships

| |
|--|
| An early success |
| Reconciliation of differences in community and university cultures |
| Co-creation as a foundational principle |
| Reciprocal, long-term commitment |
| Coherent, common community-building agenda |
| Candor and confidentiality |
| Effective co-management and coordination |
| Patient clarification and re-clarification of mutual expectations and benefits |
| Creative solutions to other challenges |
| Rewards, incentives, and support for both staff and faculty |
| Shared responsibility for long-term funding |

In the 21st-century, this concept of community involvement extends beyond the immediate borders of the campus to any community in which the university involves itself in research and creative activities. Such a realization creates a plethora of resources and scholars. Theories and programs are tested in practice, sometimes immediately, in combination with quality improvement efforts to replicate successes and change or eliminate

failed approaches to transformational change. The overall result of such partnerships and co-creative processes is the development of sounder, better tested theories and proposed solutions. To seek and accept input allows communities and researchers to deepen their mutual understanding of challenges, which creates more innovative and comprehensive solutions and applications. The result is a scholarship-focused approach to community-university partnerships, one that readily embraces and implements each of the core land-grant values of quality, inclusiveness, and connectivity.

The Co-Prosperities of Place: Local to Global and Global to Local

The world has changed and become more complex. The 21st-century has ushered in unprecedented challenges to the State of Michigan, the United States, and world. Further, the interrelatedness of the world guarantees that these challenges are no longer ever *just* local. Place matters, but solution-focused efforts toward change at the local level can inform similar efforts elsewhere. Although place always involves boundaries and contexts that can easily make for closed systems, in the 21st-century place is less and less closed. For example, urban areas increase in population while rural areas decline; economies require regional solutions; health-care increasingly requires public solutions; education no longer is confined to classrooms; the transmission of culture and organization of political action reaches distant hearts and minds; and nearly all business and commerce is at some level global. The systemic connectedness of the globe, society, and people affects every action and choice tenfold.

In this environment, higher education has an opportunity to stimulate societal growth and development for the world and its inhabitants as never before. Knowledge as the means for enacting real, meaningful, and effective solutions has never been more necessary (*Simon, 2009*). Higher education, in conjunction with those outside the academy as well as those in the academy who have not traditionally addressed certain challenges, has the opportunity to improve quality of life in the world, and the potential to increase the greater good by building sustainable global prosperity.

The co-creative process is essential, particularly when working in diverse cultures. For example, when Michigan State University faculty member Gretchen Birbeck (*Epilepsy treatment, 2006; Zambia epilepsy, 2011*) began her study of epilepsy in Zambia, she noted, "I had no idea the burden of epilepsy I would find there, but I

quickly realized that to combat this terrible disease I would have to leave the hospital and go out and engage the community (2011, p. 34).” Utilizing ethnographic approaches in community contexts, she gained firsthand knowledge of how epilepsy was understood by members of the community and the depth of its stigmatizing influence within their culture. With a deeper understanding of the cultural context of epilepsy, Birbeck and her partners designed education and treatment programs and increasingly rigorous scientific research on the etiologic factors contributing to the high prevalence of epilepsy in Zambia and elsewhere. What began a decade ago as a local nurse–medical student partnership in one small rural Zambian hospital has grown into a program that supports and enriches clinical services and advocacy programs in partnerships with nurses and Chieftainess Mwenda of the Basanje Royal Establishment.

Birbeck’s local work in Mazabuka, Zambia, spread to many other countries of sub-Saharan Africa, and expanded to include studies of malaria, famine-related drug toxicity, co-morbid HIV and epilepsy, and drug access for people with epilepsy. The breadth of these efforts provided the impetus for Michigan State University to create the International Neurologic and Psychiatric Epidemiology Program, with Birbeck as its director. The collaboration at Chikankata Hospital involving epilepsy evolved into a major engagement scholarship partnership that has produced 60 publications, over \$2 million in funding, and significant changes in the quality of life for individuals with epilepsy in sub-Saharan Africa.

Similar stories are told by those at other universities. For example, the recipient of the 2011 C. Peter Magrath University/Community Engagement Award, Montana State University’s student chapter of Engineers Without Borders, partnered with the people of Khwisero District of Western Province, Kenya, to improve the water and sanitation facilities in local schools. The students not only had to concentrate on how to build potable water facilities, they had to build trusting relationships with people who differed greatly in culture, race, and social class. As was the case for Gretchen Birbeck in Zambia, partnership development was a critical pre-activity upon which the development and sustainability of the potable water project was dependent. Since 2004, its efforts have resulted in wells at seven schools, composting latrines at five schools, distribution pipelines, a health clinic, and a market, while involving over 75 students and generating substantial grant funding. Montana State University’s student chapter of Engineers Without Borders’ global experiences in Kenya have transferred to

local collaborative activities between Montana State University and the Tribal communities of Montana (*Stein & Schmalzbauer, 2012*).

Conclusion

In this essay, we have explored how engaged scholarship has evolved in research-intensive land-grant universities, like Michigan State University, and how the world grant ideal brings community engaged scholarship into focus. Having been part of the land-grant founding outreach mission, community-engaged scholarship has gained a 21st-century presence as an effective way for universities to test and refine the means by which they play a critical role in society. Once focused on agriculture and manufacturing, engaged scholarship now includes all disciplines, professional programs, institutes, and centers that compose the modern university. Under the umbrella of the world grant ideal, engaged scholarship offers the potential for universities to serve as engines of societal growth the world over, in an endless cycle of learning, teaching, learning, and accomplishing. Engaged scholarship has a place in all disciplines that strive to put theories and research into practice, and that value blending academic and community knowledge to solve community problems while simultaneously adding to the corpus of proven practices through reliance on methods appropriate to knowledge discovery and knowledge application.

At Michigan State University, the Office of the Associate Provost for University Outreach and Engagement supports generating, transmitting, applying, and preserving knowledge for the direct benefit of external audiences through a scholarly model of outreach and engagement that fosters a reciprocal and mutually beneficial relationship between the university and the public. By engaging with societal issues, Michigan State University is able both to aid society near and far, and to increase the knowledge base about these issues, including both their causes and their solutions. By using discovery and application approaches to knowledge generation, faculty members are able to succeed as scholars, and communities can achieve solutions to a wide range of problems associated with health and well-being, K-20 (kindergarten through college) education, transportation systems, innovation centers and entrepreneurial needs, information technology and knowledge economy, and business startups. Involving students in such projects deepens their understanding that quality, inclusiveness, and connectivity are core to their civic responsibilities within a democratic society. Such outcomes are also core to the idea that universities must be anchor institutions to communities,

contributing to the revitalization of societal problems wherever they exist, and working collaboratively with communities to effect sustainable solutions (*Lynton & Elman, 1987*). But to achieve these goals, at minimum, a university must

- align itself so that engagement scholarship cuts across its mission and is an acceptable form of faculty scholarship and student learning;
- provide professional development programs designed to prepare faculty members to engage in community-based research;
- create opportunities and experiences for undergraduate and graduate students to learn about their disciplines outside the classroom in situations where they must simultaneously learn about other cultures and peoples as well as learn more about themselves;
- emphasize the scholarship of integration in both its multidisciplinary aspect and its teaching-research-service integration aspect;
- identify the institutional values that will guide the collective engagement activities of its students, faculty, administrators, and other employees; and
- embrace the global frame guiding the transformation of higher education in the 21st-century.

More than ever before, changes throughout the world have created the potential for universities to engage with society through research and scholarship to benefit knowledge generation and application, as well as the global population (*Bjarnason & Coldstream, 2003*). The potential for universities to drive societal growth and development for the greater good of the world and its inhabitants has never been more appropriate or necessary. Knowledge and understanding of the world and its current and future needs will allow humanity to move the world toward greater good (*Simon, 2009*). But this knowledge and understanding of the world must be useful to society.

At Michigan State University, the concept of scholarship for the benefit of individuals as well as the State of Michigan, the United States, and the world permeates the university's history. Adapting the core values central to traditional land-grant ideals and practices to address the broad challenges of the 21st-century is an imperative independent of institutional type or societal sector. It is an

imperative with societal urgency—locally and globally. This is the power and relevance of the world grant ideal and its integration with engagement scholarship.

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