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Creating an Institutional Agenda for Community-Engaged Scholarship Faculty Development

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ABSTRACT

Building a comprehensive and robust faculty development agenda is key to securing an institution's status as a fully engaged campus. This article provides an editorial on the articles presented in this volume, which highlight the experiences of a group of engaged scholars and their research partners who participated in a four-year faculty development initiative designed to enhance their capacities to produce high-quality, community-engaged scholarship.

Keywords: engaged campus, faculty development, engaged scholarship, institutionalization

Building an engaged campus takes more than establishing, implementing, and supporting a set of community-focused projects, programs, and partnerships. It requires achieving substantive shifts in institutional culture and academic practices. Those of us who work in higher education can readily point to activities and practices on our campuses that connect our institution's academic activities to the work of community-based organizations and the needs of the broader society. But, the collective presence of these externally focused efforts does not constitute an engaged university. Indeed, upon close inspection, there are many qualitative differences between a "campus with engagement activities" and an "engaged campus."

An engaged campus is one that sees community engagement not as a set of socially-embedded projects or activities, but rather as an intentional strategy for facilitating the advancement of key internal (institutional) and external (societal) goals. For example, on an engaged campus, community engagement is viewed as a core method for delivering and securing quality

teaching; students are provided authentic, experiential learning experiences (high impact educational practices) that allow them to deepen their understanding of the course content and its applicability and societal value beyond the course. Similarly, at an engaged university, community engagement is used to ensure the institution achieves its mission to produce research of significance that benefits society; community partnerships are valued because they enhance researchers' capacity to conduct and produce higher quality research. In essence, on engaged campuses, the ultimate goal is not to do community engagement. Rather, the goal is to value community engagement as a key academic strategy to produce high-quality research, teaching, and outreach that ultimately result in positive societal impacts.

For sure, shifting the institutional mindset from viewing community-engaged work as a set of discrete community projects and time-limited partnerships to valuing community engagement as an academically legitimate strategy for producing impactful research, teaching, and outreach is

not an easy feat. The institutional tilt toward an engaged campus mindset requires the full implementation of comprehensive and often disruptive systemic changes, such as restructuring of faculty reward systems, expanding epistemological and pedagogical understanding, incorporating interdisciplinary thinking, and legitimizing the value of community partners' knowledge and experience (Holland, 2001; Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011). To succeed, progress toward building an engaged campus requires multi-level, institutional commitments that are sustained over an extended period of time and are guided by a comprehensive, well-thought-out institutionalization plan designed to transform the institutional infrastructure, policies, and culture in ways that more fully embrace the engagement philosophy.

THE ROLE OF FACULTY IN BUILDING THE ENGAGED CAMPUS

The key catalysts for and purveyors of this institutional culture shift are the faculty (O'Meara et al., 2011). Indeed, findings from research studies reveal that faculty involvement, support, and capacity for community-engaged work are the strongest predictors for furthering the institutionalization of community engagement in higher education (Fitzgerald et al., 2012; Furco, 2007). This is likely because faculty members build the curriculum and determine academic priorities. They facilitate and shape the institution's overall research agenda. And typically, they are the ones who remain on a campus the longest, and therefore, have the capacity to sustain and cultivate change that inherently requires years and decades to take hold and mature.

As campuses continue to deepen their community engagement institutionalization efforts, we now are witnessing a substantial growth in the number and kinds of

faculty development initiatives that seek to build faculty members' capacities to partner effectively with diverse communities in ways that result in scientifically rigorous and societally impactful scholarship. A review of various engagement-focused faculty development efforts reveals an increased emphasis on helping engaged scholars deepen their understanding of specific topics, such as effective partnership building, documenting community-engaged scholarship, navigating human subjects protocols, and translating scholarly work for diverse communities. These faculty development opportunities also tend to be short term (one-time workshops or workshop series) and often lack follow-up with participants once the workshops have ended.

STRENGTHENING THE FACULTY DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

As the University of Minnesota's Associate Vice President for Public Engagement, I am responsible for finding ways to best support our faculty and academic units in advancing their community-engaged scholarly agendas and in furthering our institution's journey in becoming a fully engaged university. Along with the traditional short-term faculty development workshops on community-engaged scholarship that are found on many campuses, I have been eager to explore new and innovative ways to support our faculty in their community-engaged scholarly efforts. Having a diversity of approaches and perspectives regarding faculty community-engaged scholarship is important for a large, research-intensive university such as ours. While a growing number of our departments is offering opportunities for engaged scholars to build their capacity for community-engaged work, these faculty development opportunities remain primarily discipline focused, highlighting the specific

technical and scientific skills and approaches that scholars in the respective fields should know. While such depth of disciplinary understanding is essential and important in conducting scholarly work in general, it is often inadequate for conducting community-engaged work, which requires scholars to have facility with interdisciplinary perspectives, methodological intersectionalities, and broad-based epistemologies.

The literature on faculty development strategies for community-engaged scholarship points to several essential elements that are key to advancing faculty capacity for engaged scholarship. These elements include the presence of learning communities, safe spaces, critical feedback, and opportunities to deepen relationships with community partners (Blanchard et al., 2009; Jordan et al., 2012). In addition, this literature suggests that giving faculty members opportunities to work directly with members of the community helps hone the necessary interdisciplinary, methodological, and epistemological understandings that are necessary to conduct high-quality, engaged scholarship. With this in mind, this volume examines the potential outcomes and impacts of a faculty development initiative designed to incorporate these essential elements.

BUILDING A ROBUST FACULTY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

The seven articles in this volume present the personal experiences of a small group of faculty and their research team members (including community partners) who participated in a multi-year faculty development program (Scholars Program) at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. The Scholars Program focused on enhancing researchers' capacity for community-engaged scholarship by going beyond the

traditional "workshop series" model. The program brought together four scholars from different disciplines to cultivate their individual engaged research over an extended period of time (four years) by participating in a learning community designed to deepen and enhance their overall scholarship. The program was established and facilitated by community-engaged scholarship expert Catherine Jordan, a University of Minnesota pediatrics professor whose publications on the evaluation of engaged scholarship and her editorial work on the peer-reviewed journal, *CES4Health*, have shaped national conversations on the elements that foster high-quality engaged scholarship. For this volume, the participants of these scholars Program and their research teams were invited to share their experiences and to highlight the particular aspects of the program they found most valuable, useful, and challenging.

From these articles, we are able to identify the potential benefits and limitations of this approach to faculty development, which in turn, can guide our future engaged scholarship faculty development offerings to ensure we incorporate into the program the elements and components that have had the greatest impact on participants. Both individually and collectively, the articles in this volume showcase the program participants' evolving views about engaged scholarship. They also demonstrate the extent to which a longer-term, cohort model approach to faculty development has the potential to enhance participants' understanding of community issues and overall scholarly output. The authors (Scholars Program participants) provide rich, candid accounts of the mistakes they made, the lessons they learned, and the personal and professional growth they experienced through the program. Most interesting is the fact that even for the participants who had years of experience conducting community-based

research, their involvement in this faculty development initiative enlightened them with new vistas regarding the ways the community views the value and importance of their scholarly work.

The presentation of these scholars' experiences brings into sharper focus the essential components that play important roles in developing faculty capacity and expertise for engaged scholarship. These components include the importance of viewing community issues through a multidisciplinary and ecological lens, having a safe space to try new approaches, seeing failed attempts as valuable opportunities to learn and grow, understanding that becoming an engaged scholar is a developmental process that requires building skills over time, acknowledging that being in the community is very different than knowing and understanding the community, having longer-term institutional support for securing high-quality engaged scholarship, and valuing cultural knowledge and community experience as critical components for producing engaged scholarly work that matters. The scholars' presentations also highlight the enormous challenge of incorporating broader epistemologies within the research enterprise. While all of the participating researchers began the program genuinely valuing and appreciating the importance of incorporating community knowledge and experience into their research, their involvement in the Scholars Program made them realize that the practicalities of doing so were much more challenging than initially thought.

All of the authors also point to the importance of having in place a program on the campus on which they could rely to guide them as they navigated the many rough waters and the ever-changing sea currents of community-engaged research. Having a cadre of colleagues who were experiencing similar challenges was seen as es-

sential for sustaining their involvement in community-engaged research. In addition, the productivity expectations and structure of the Scholars Program helped ensure that all of the participants would produce outputs that would enhance their professional careers. Given that securing mutual respect and trust is essential for building high-quality community partnerships, and that achieving this takes time, it can be difficult for engaged scholars to stay on track regarding meeting annual expectations for publishing and producing other scholarly outputs. The peer accountability that the Scholars Program established helped ensure that the participants did not fall behind in meeting their respective departments' expectations for scholarship.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

For me, this collection of articles reinforces the importance of securing longer-term investments in faculty development initiatives that provide the necessary resources, support, and learning spaces for engaged scholars to innovate, challenge themselves, experiment, fail, retry, evolve, and grow. It also reveals that much more needs to be done within individual academic departments to elevate the importance of community-engaged scholarship. While one can find many scholars across many different departments who conduct community-engaged research, these scholars often work independently from other engaged scholars; most do not know or realize that a robust cadre of kindred engaged scholars exists on the campus. Finding a way to network engaged scholars more fully across the campus, and then offering them the support and guidance they might need to deepen their work over time are the kinds of investments that would further our institutional efforts to achieve status as a fully engaged campus.

In reading these articles and in

learning more about the work of these dynamic and dedicated scholars, it has become clear that the success of their work goes hand in hand with having in place the institutional structures, policies, and culture that allow community-engaged scholarship to thrive. As the literature on engagement suggests, building an engaged campus is not achieved through the implementation of piecemeal initiatives or additive approaches. Rather, it is achieved through the incorporation of well-integrated, strategic, complementary, and mutually reinforcing efforts that, when implemented and incorporated together, create a notch effect that leads to systemic change. It is the combination of these institutional supports and the faculty capacity to conduct high-quality, community-engaged work that help build a truly engaged campus.

On behalf of the University of Minnesota, I thank Professor Jordan for establishing and leading this valuable faculty development program and for creating the space for our faculty to learn and grow in innumerable ways as they pursue their engaged scholarly agendas. I also thank all of the dedicated engaged scholars and community partners who participated in the Scholars Program. Thank you for sharing your experiences and insights us as we continue to strive to learn more about how to best support faculty members n their journey to grow and evolve as engaged scholars.

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