

Facilitating Campus Engagement

Remarks Kentucky Conference on Engagement November 19, 2008

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Thank you for the opportunity to be with you today. I'm particularly grateful for the ambiguous title: "Facilitating Campus Engagement." Rather than try to substitute one of my own, I simply allowed this title to take me where it would. And it caused me to take a 30,000 ft view of engagement from my particular vantage point, as someone who works in a higher education association in Washington, D.C. I suspect many people in higher education, particularly those at this engagement conference, would like to see engagement become more prominent in the landscape of higher education. Yet my review found people working at cross purposes, or at least not seeing their own personal goals as complementary to, instead of conflicting with, the goals of others. In the immortal words of the Captain in Cool Hand Luke, "what we have here," I believe, "is a failure to communicate."

Today I want to do three things: 1. Put engagement in context; 2. Raise some questions and issues; and 3. Offer some suggestions about how to advance the work.

Let me begin first with the issue of context. If there are some broad areas of emerging focus in higher education, especially public higher education, at this, the dawn of the 21st century, I'd put the most prominent of these in three categories. These are often seen as distinct and separate issues but as I will argue later, these could and should be connected together to maximize the advancement of the engagement agenda. The first

of these areas of focus is funding. The present global fiscal crisis only exacerbates an already difficult situation. Angelo Armenti, president of California University of Pennsylvania, recently did a study of funding for public colleges in PA. Over the past 16 years, public funding for his institution has dropped from 64% to 37%...mirroring the pattern across the state. He predicts that by 2041, all of PA's public colleges will be private, a process he calls "privatization without a plan." Connected to support and funding are a variety of other issues. Jane Wellman's Delta Project finds that universities are spending more money, but not necessarily in the most productive ways. She asserts that the crisis includes growing gaps between rich and poor institutions, greater clustering of poor students in poorly-financed institutions, and disinvestment in teaching. Carole Twigg's work of academic transformation has demonstrated time and again that institutions can reduce costs and increase learning outcomes, student satisfaction, and student success. Funding, where it comes from and how it is used, is certainly one of the major issues higher education confronts at the beginning of this new century.

The second broad area of focus is on student learning outcomes, seen through the lens of my association in at least two initiatives: as civic outcomes encouraged by the American Democracy Project, and in collaboration with NASULGC, as critical thinking and communications outcomes measured by the Voluntary System of Accountability. We see that focus on student learning outcomes in the Spellings Report, in debates about the future shape of accreditation, and in a variety of other places. Perhaps most noteworthy early on was the development and growth of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), and especially the work of George Kuh in identifying successful strategies for greater student learning outcomes. Just last week, a national alliance was

announced to focus on the measurement of student learning, with leadership from some Washington higher education associations and several foundations. This past week, the Gates Foundation announced a major new initiative on college completion, inseparably linked to learning outcomes.

Finally, and most important for our discussion today, the third significant area of focus in higher education is engagement. I want to come back at the end of these remarks to tie together these three movements, but first let me focus on engagement. I've noted, as has everyone in this room, the growth of the term "engagement." It is the new buzz word in higher education. When I started into the research for today's comments, I was amazed to chronicle the growth of the focus on engagement. David Scobey called the recent rapid growth "a phase shift from simmer to boil"...and that was 2 years ago. Here's a quick sample of recent engagement items in what was a very cursory review...and each of you could add many many more examples:

Faculty Focus

- Higher Education Network for Community Engagement (HENCE)
- National Center for the Study of University Engagement
- National Review Board for the Scholarship of Engagement
- Recent gathering in New Orleans about promotion and tenure for the Scholarship of Engagement
- CCPH Project and charette on faculty engagement
- Imagining America blueprint for Promotion and Tenure
- The years of work by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching's CASTL program
- Multiple journal articles
- Multiple conference themes and presentations. Example: Innovation and Leadership for Engagement (The Scholarship of Outreach and Engagement: What Is It and Why Does It Matter?). 9th annual Outreach Scholarship Conference. Penn State University, Oct 7-9, 2008

Leadership Focus

- Jim Vortuba's Symposium on Regional Stewardship
- Virginia Tech Engagement Academy

- Conference themes and presentations at presidential and provostial meetings. For example, AASCU's Academic Affairs meeting for chief academic officers in February 2009 will focus on the role of provosts in the engaged university.

Institutional Focus

- AASCU's Stewards of Place (chaired by Jim Votruba) and host of conferences and local events
- Carnegie new Elective Classification on Engagement
- Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities (CUMU), its Metropolitan Universities Journal, and its annual conference (this year, Building Bridges to Regional Stewardship, October 18-21, 2008)
- Society for College and University Planning (SCUP)'s recent webinar: The Engaged Library
- Arizona State University's vision as a New American University
- And of course, this 3rd annual Kentucky conference

Yet the review of the field also left me with questions, puzzles, and concerns.

The most prominent concern is the question of definition. Is this a movement, or simply a disjointed set of activities under a common rubric? Is the definition of engagement clear enough? So what does the word "engagement" mean in higher education? Community Engagement? Civic Engagement? Regional Stewardship? Student engagement? The problem with the term "engagement" is that it can mean almost anything. It reminds of that wonderful exchange from "Through the Looking Glass" by Lewis Carroll.

`I don't know what you mean by "glory",' Alice said.
 Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. `Of course you don't -- till I tell you. I meant "there's a nice knock-down argument for you!"
 `But "glory" doesn't mean "a nice knock-down argument",' Alice objected.
 `When I use a word,' Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, `it means just what I choose it to mean -- neither more nor less.'

"The question is," said Alice, "whether you can make words mean different things."

"The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master -- that's all."

Here's the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching definition of (community) engagement: Community Engagement describes the collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity. The classification definition goes on to include at least three categories:

- Curricular Engagement includes institutions where teaching, learning and scholarship engage faculty, students, and community in mutually beneficial and respectful collaboration. Their interactions address community-identified needs, deepen students' civic and academic learning, enhance community well-being, and enrich the scholarship of the institution.
- Outreach & Partnerships includes institutions that provided compelling evidence of one or both of two approaches to community engagement. *Outreach* focuses on the application and provision of institutional resources for community use with benefits to both campus and community. *Partnerships* focuses on collaborative interactions with community and related scholarship for the mutually beneficial exchange, exploration, and application of knowledge, information, and resources (research, capacity building, economic development, etc.).
- Curricular Engagement and Outreach & Partnerships includes institutions with substantial commitments in both areas described above.

From the Carnegie definition, it seems to me that there are at least four (4) lenses through which to view engagement, at least in terms of outcomes: A.) as economic development;

B.) as knowledge creation, C.) as civic improvement; and D.) as student civic engagement.

- A. Engagement as economic development: Clearly economic development is one dominant frame for engagement. I saw an engagement conference mentioned in the Washington Post yesterday...George Mason University's Mid-Atlantic Innovation Showcase...described as a meeting of "bow-tied professors, venture capitalists, and the young executives from fledgling companies."
- B. Knowledge development: There is substantial focus in the work on engagement to create a new epistemology. Some scholars are talking about engagement as a means of creating knowledge in new, collaborative ways. I'm reminded of the recent study published in the journal of Nature that compared the accuracy of scientific entries in Wikipedia with the Encyclopedia Britannica...and found few differences in accuracy, despite a very different model of knowledge creation. Does that study herald the beginning of a new age in epistemology, when issues of expertise and authority begin to be challenged in very fundamental ways?
- C. Civic improvement: Sometimes engagement describes connections to the world for the specific purpose of civic improvement. Included are activities such as building civic capacity, etc. Here the focus is on who benefits, and most of the benefit accrues to the larger community.
- D. Student civic engagement: a focus on student civic learning outcomes, which are often subsumed in the other categories. Here the focus is on students. Our work in the American Democracy Project has, from the beginning, focused on institutional transformation to achieve specific student civic outcomes.

Is the definition of engagement too broad? Is the meaning so broad as to lose meaning?

Is the meaning so broad as to not motivate action?

It seems to me that for this to become a comprehensive movement, we need a clear definition, one that is broadly agreed upon, that is used to distinguish some “good” activity from other, less desirable activities. The broader the definition, the more inclusive, the less likely that the definition can win over converts, rally the faithful, and convert the wicked.

In viewing the experience of the past 2 cycles of Carnegie Classification work on the engagement category, Amy Driscoll reports that engagement involves a highly variable set of activities, often very institution-specific. She describes engagement being a big tent. Is that appropriate? The Carnegie Classification, as currently used, certainly seems to take a big tent approach, with many distinctions created, as Amy notes, by individual institutions.

Yet at what point does inclusiveness rob the definition of vibrancy, and indeed usefulness? For example, in the most recent Engaged Scholar Magazine, Michigan State University reported the following forms of engagement by faculty and academic staff:

- Technical or Expert Assistance
- Outreach Research and Creative Activity
- Clinical Service
- Experiential/service-learning
- Public events and understanding
- Non-credit classes and programs
- Credit classes and programs

Is this old wine in new bottles? How much of the activity described by the Engaged Scholar Magazine, for example, as “engagement” would have happened 10 years ago,

before the emphasis on engagement? Are we shifting the focus but not fundamentally changing the work? Alex McCormick suggests that perhaps engagement might create broadly-recognized distinctions, beyond simply institutional distinctiveness.

It seems to me that the definition of “engagement,” like Humpty Dumpty asserted, depends of who is doing the defining. I can imagine the following purposes of engagement, echoing and expanding the speculation about the possible definitions embedded in the Carnegie Classification definition:

- For political support
- For financial support
- To broaden the definition of scholarship
- To change epistemology
- For civic improvement of communities
- For civic outcomes for students

Does the definition of engagement depend on the role of the individual involved?

- For presidents and university administrators, is engagement designed for garnering public support, for greater financial support, or for civic improvement?
- For faculty, is engagement designed to broaden the definition of scholarship or to change epistemology? Or is it designed to privilege a new set of formerly less privileged faculty? Said another way, is the focus on engagement a way to re-balance the faculty roles and rewards?
- For students, is engagement about service, or about service-learning, about developing political agency, or just escaping the boredom of the modern but traditional model of higher education?

What we need, it seems to me, is a definition that allows, in Humpty Dumpty’s words, many to be masters. In other words, we ought to not gloss over the differences between definitions but examine them closely to see where the linkages and opportunities are.

The fact that presidents and faculty have different ideas about engagement isn't surprising, given the differences in their circumstances, expectations, and rewards. But the two groups could be allies in trying to transform the university, if they understood how their views of engagement are complementary instead of competing.

The problem of definition extends to assessment. In a world of ambiguous meaning, how do we assess engagement? Do we focus on activities or outcomes? Do we measure effort? Intensity? How do we craft a set of measures that are adequate? Where are the measurement tools and assessment strategies? The Outreach and Engagement Measurement Instrument (OEMI) at Michigan State University, which is a great start, still only measures activity, self-reported. How will we craft an assessment scheme that will provide measures of the outcome or impact of this work?

The problem of definition also affects scholarship. Despite the great efforts by so many, scholarship of engagement is still a very problematic issue. Part of the problem is that the socialization of faculty, from graduate schools on, is about a traditional view of knowledge creation. There are, to be sure, very exciting efforts underway, including "Re-Envisioning the Ph.D.," an initiative started at the beginning of this century, the work of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching to create the CASTL program, and recent efforts like the Imaging America Tenure Report. Yet the work is still running up against ingrained habits and practices of the professoriate. Huge core questions remain...about who is the peer, about how knowledge is created, about where authority resides. Julie Ellison reports that deans and department chairs are a significant barrier to change, that too many arts and science deans still see this as "outsider" work. Gene Rice wonders about the status of knowledge, and the primacy of "cosmopolitan"

knowledge over local knowledge. He also worries that Boyer's conception of multiple paths of scholarship, rather than being seen as integrative, seems to be spinning off separate worlds. Studies such as Stokes' Pasteur's Quadrant and Kuhn's Structure of Scientific Revolutions suggest how hard it is to change the paradigm of knowledge generation and development.

In any of the definitions, where are students in this work? I worry most about students in the world of engagement. They are implied but seldom mentioned. When presidents talk about engagement, I suspect that community relations and economic development concerns dominate, with a whiff of hope for better state funding. When faculty talk about engagement, it's almost always about scholarship. Where are students in these discussions? In talking about the distinctiveness of the university's role in modern society, I wish I heard as much about students as I hear about scholarship and knowledge creation.

And finally, where does any definition of engagement take us? What are the long-term consequences for the university for a commitment to engagement, in terms of identity, function, and support? I hear presidents talk about engagement in economic development terms, often in ways that probably confuse listeners, thinking that they're hearing from a branch of the local Chamber of Commerce. When some service-learning enthusiasts talk about their work, listeners can be understandably confused, thinking they are listening to a spokesperson from a local charity. What are the defining and essential characteristics of universities that distinguish them from chambers of commerce, charitable organizations, or community improvement organizations? Should universities be connected to their communities, states, regions, and world? Absolutely. Yet they

need to remain distinguishable, both for funding purposes, and for outcomes and purposes. As we move towards more porous boundaries between the university and the larger community, we may lose our sense of self. The article in the Chronicle last week about public institutions in Ohio provides a glimpse into one possible future. The chancellor of the Ohio Board of Regents unveiled a 10 year plan to address higher education's most critical role. He said that the state's higher-education system needed to be transformed to squarely focus on economic revitalization.

Looking forward: What is needed to advance this work?

So far, I think, this thing we call engagement seems like a set of interests and enthusiasms that are operating much of the time in parallel, instead of in concert. If we want to strengthen this effort, we need to identify shared interests, and connect individuals and groups with common concerns. In other words, we need to build a big tent, but be clear about how those within the tent relate to one another. Otherwise, it's just a big tent. If you are a strong supporter of the university's move toward greater engagement (which I am), it seems to me that the core question is: how do we create a more coordinated, articulated movement?

- A. Create a definition of engagement that creates legitimacy for the different work of different groups, and a vision of the inter-connectedness of the different kinds of work that results in a coherent whole.
- B. Seek to align the multiple interests. In *Built to Last*, Collins and Porras suggest that successful organizations align their various parts to focus on well-defined outcomes. Align administration, faculty, and student interests. Align competing faculty interests. Align institutional and community/state interests.
- C. Connect engagement to funding and student learning outcomes. There are, I believe, enormous overlaps between these three issues. Presidents and faculty are rightly concerned about funding, especially in the continuing decline in public funding, and the difficulty in competing for shrinking federal dollars. Could some

new forms of funding be accelerated by engagement? And could a changing epistemology, and new insights into how students learn, connect engagement to reduced costs and greater student learning outcomes. I certainly think that's possible. But that will take a strategic, coordinated approach, using some of the mechanisms I have just described.

- D. Focus on faculty socialization and development throughout the pipeline: doctoral programs, faculty hiring and socialization, promotion, tenure, recognition, etc.
- E. Use key agencies and organizations to advance the work:
 - 1. Accreditation
 - 2. States (Kentucky is a leader in this work, as evidenced by this, its 3rd Engagement Conference)
 - 3. Use organizations: Presidential organizations, discipline organizations, higher ed organizations
 - 4. Use funding: Federal government – EPA, Housing and Urban Development, NEH, etc.; Foundations
- F. Use structures and tools: Workshops and other training; samples of policies and practices, esp. for RPT.; conference presentations; publications; etc.
- G. Form a national steering group with reps from all sectors, perhaps funded by a foundation? Or not funded externally at all, as funding invariably shapes outcomes. Here is where the “failure to communicate” problem could be most directly addressed.

I believe that engagement has the possibility of fundamentally reshaping our institutions as vibrant, contributing members of a new age. But to achieve that goal, we need to build a sense of connection, of purpose, between major actors who have thought of themselves principally in their own narrow roles. We need to link together what are often seen as separate and distinct higher education issues, such as funding and student learning outcomes, with the work of engagement. For example, engagement is a way of responding to both the need for greater student learning outcomes and differential sources of funding. Those three issues are inseparably linked. Finally, we need to create a comprehensive vision of a collective future, aligning what have sometimes been very

different visions of our work. But working collectively, I believe we have a real opportunity to create the engaged universities of the 21st century.

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