Strengthening the Engagement Dossier: Tips and Tools for Faculty

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Abstract

The growth of the engagement movement in higher education over the past two decades has resulted in more faculty interest and practice in engaged scholarship. As more institutions value this work, faculty are looking for ways to enhance the effectiveness of their engagement dossiers for promotion and tenure. This article summarizes a workshop on strengthening the engaged dossier offered in a variety of venues. I provide an overview of engaged scholarship, engaged scholarship tenure and promotion resources, a four step process for documenting engagement in the academic dossier, dossier review criteria and contextual factors, and a list of best practices for faculty building their engagement dossier.

Introduction

Increasing numbers of faculty show interest in embracing outreach and engagement work as part of their academic journey. However, many of them struggle with ways to document their efforts to prepare for tenure and promotion. The engagement movement in higher education has made significant gains in providing tips and tools for faculty, however, they have not been brought together in a way for faculty to easily access them. To fill this gap, I called upon my 30 years of experience with Cooperative Extension and other engagement, service on tenure and promotion committees at all levels, and life in a variety of academic cultures at five Land-Grant universities to create a workshop for faculty on the engagement dossier. This article summarizes that workshop by providing an overview of engaged scholarship, engaged scholarship tenure and promotion resources, a four step process for documenting engagement in the academic dossier, dossier review criteria and contextual factors, and a list of best practices for faculty building their engagement dossier.
Engaged Scholarship

Over the years I’ve discovered four approaches to engagement and scholarship in higher education. Each approach is differentiated by the degree of engagement and scholarship activity (see Figure 1).

Most institutions require faculty to provide service for groups. This is often documented as a one way or expert presentation to groups, serving on internal committees, and participation in professional associations. A service approach usually results in minimal engagement due to the one way nature of the activity and little scholarly activity.

Scholarship on its own is usually defined as original intellectual work that is communicated and validated by peers (Norman, 2001). It is often expressed as articles published in peer reviewed journals, peer reviewed presentations and posters, and juried creative works. This approach usually does not include engagement since the focus is solely on scholarship.

Engagement is defined as a reciprocal partnership between faculty and partners where an exchange of knowledge and resources takes place for mutual benefit (Carnegie Foundation, 2011). This may include service learning, community-based participatory action research, or other projects with partners. The main focus is on the engagement aspects of the work.

Engaged scholarship combines the principles of scholarship and engagement. In this approach, faculty conduct engagement and integrate scholarship into the process. This may include working with community members to produce reports and policy changes based on the engagement work, students presenting posters in academic venues about service learning experiences, or faculty writing about and or with partners about engagement work for a scholarly
For faculty to present a clear case for tenure or promotion from an engaged scholarship platform, they not only need to understand the approaches to scholarship and engagement, they also need to articulate a definition of engaged scholarship. The definition I find most appropriate in my work with communities is a reciprocal relationship with a community that adds value to the community and my discipline. For faculty, this means documenting the two-way relationship between academic and public partnerships that produces a beneficial legacy. The partner has a substantial role in the engagement and the scholarship. This definition is the heart of one model for approaching engaged scholarship in a holistic fashion that provides multiple points for faculty to tell their engaged scholarship story (Franz, 2009a).

**Engaged Scholarship Tenure and Promotions Resources**

Over the last fifteen years, a variety of resources have been developed to help faculty better understand how engaged scholarship is defined, measured, and articulated. The following resources in particular have appealed to faculty as they plan for and prepare their tenure and promotion dossiers:

- Community-Campus Partnership for Health (2011)
- Community-Engaged Scholarship: Is Faculty Work in Communities a True Academic Enterprise? (2005) by Calleson, Jordan, and Seifer
- Evaluating Faculty Performance (2002) by Colebeck
- National Review Board for the Scholarship of Engagement (2011)
- Promotion, Tenure, and Merit-Based Pay: 15 Keys to Success (2008) by O’Neill
- Scholarship Assessed (1997) by Glassick, Huber, and Maeroff
- The Disciplines Speak (1995) edited by Diamond and Adam
- UniSCOPE (2008) by the UniSCOPE Learning Community
Faculty have also found these journals as the academic home for engaged scholarship:

- Australian Journal of University Community Engagement
- Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning
- Community Development Journal
- Community Works Journal
- Gateways: International Journal of Community Research and Engagement
- The International Journal of Volunteer Administration
- Innovative Higher Education
- International Journal of Public Participation
- Journal for Civic Commitment
- Journal for Community Engagement and Higher Education
- Journal for Community Engagement and Scholarship
- Journal for Higher Education Outreach and Engagement
- Journal of Extension
- Metropolitan Universities Journal (IUPUI)
- Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning
- Partnerships: A Journal of Service-Learning and Civic Engagement
- Progress in Community Health Partnerships: Research, Education, and Action
- Science Education and Civic Engagement: An International Journal

As the engaged scholarship movement grows and matures in scope and depth, resources have been added to this list. Faculty can be assured that additional resources will be forthcoming to assist them in their quest to determine and document their engaged scholarship agenda.

**Four Steps to Documenting Engagement in the Academic Dossier**

I’ve discovered four steps that help faculty prepare effective engagement dossiers. These include mapping their efforts, determining the impact to be measured, collecting and analyzing data, and telling the engaged scholarship story.

*Mapping engaged scholarship efforts*

Early in a faculty member’s career, they should be planning for promotion and tenure. To aid this process, a map should be created that outlines the main points to be recorded. At a minimum, the map should include a situation or problem statement that clearly addresses why the faculty member’s engaged scholarship is important, the inputs needed to address the issue or problem,
the outputs or activities that will take place and the audiences for those activities, the intended outcomes or impact from the work, and the assumptions and external factors that affect the work.

Three main methods tend to be used by faculty to map their engaged scholarship path: 1) text, 2) concept maps, and 3) logic models.

Determining impact to be measured

In this step of designing the engaged dossier, faculty determine the type of impact they hope to have in their work with partners. This may include the processes used in educational efforts to report on the quality of a program, teaching, or research. The impact could focus on products created from educational or research efforts that show impact on individuals and communities. The faculty member may also want to document their own performance as an instructor or researcher or the performance and quality of their programs, teaching, or research.

During this step, potential impact questions should be determined to be measured over a 3-5 year time span. These may include, What new knowledge was discovered, developed, or disseminated? What did participants learn? How have participant aspirations or motivations changed due to the program? How do participants intend to or have changed behavior due to the program? How have economic, environmental, or social conditions changed due to your efforts?

Next, faculty should determine the methods of engaged scholarship they plan to use. These may include engaged pedagogy, internships, deliberation, participatory action research, public information network development, study circles, civic skills literacy for public participation, or other methods. Faculty not familiar with methods of engaged scholarship should refer to the aforementioned engaged scholarship journals.

Once the type of impact and impact questions are determined, the faculty member should
document the intended scholarly peer, applied, and community products that will be produced from their efforts. Table 1 shows the portfolio of products resulting from a three year community-based participatory action research project. Peer products may include articles, conference posters, presentations, abstracts and proceedings, and grants or competitive contracts. Applied products may include curricula, guides, technical assistance, and policy development. Community products may include forums, workshops, newsletters, websites, presentations, reports, designs, or displays.

Table 1. How Farmers Learn Research Project Products Developed and Disseminated

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product Type</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Audience</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Article</td>
<td>Consistency and Change in Participatory Action Research: Reflections on a Focus Group Study about How Farmers Learn</td>
<td>The Qualitative Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article</td>
<td>Farmer, Agent, and Specialist Perspectives on Preferences for Learning Among Today’s Farmers</td>
<td>Journal of Extension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article</td>
<td>How Farmers Learn: Implications for Agricultural Educators</td>
<td>Journal of Rural Social Sciences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article</td>
<td>A Holistic Model of Engaged Scholarship: Telling the Story Across Higher Education’s Missions</td>
<td>Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article</td>
<td>Meeting the Educational Needs of Women Farmers in the 21st Century</td>
<td>Journal of Extension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article</td>
<td>How Farmers Learn</td>
<td>Innovations (general audience), college alumni publication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article</td>
<td>Meeting the Educational Needs of Sustainable Agriculture Producers</td>
<td>Journal of Extension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conference Presentations</td>
<td>American Evaluation Association (Denver), Virginia Biological Farmers (Richmond), Virginia Cooperative Extension Pesticide Safety Education Conference (Roanoke),</td>
<td>Program evaluators, farmers, agriculture educators</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professional Agriculture Workers Conference (Tuskegee),</td>
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<tr>
<td>Virginia Extension dairy agents and specialists, Virginia Extension agricultural agents and specialists, Virginia Extension agents program evaluation workshop, North Carolina A&amp;T agents, specialists, administration, and staff, Arkansas Extension Staff Conference, Tennessee Extension Staff Adobe Connect</td>
<td>Agriculture educators, farmers</td>
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<td>Dispositions of Tennessee Farmers for Learning Online</td>
<td>Extension agents and specialists</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lessons Learned from Year One</td>
<td>Project researchers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reaching Agricultural Producers Through Effective Newsletters</td>
<td>Agriculture educators</td>
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<td>Using Hands-on Learning to Educate Producers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Why Do Producers Attend or Do Not Attend Extension Meetings</td>
<td>Extension agents/specialists</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How Farmers Learn: Improving Sustainable Agriculture Education</td>
<td>Researchers</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>How Farmers Learn: Improving Agriculture Education</td>
<td>Researchers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How Farmers Learn: Improving Agriculture Education</td>
<td>General campus audience, Virginia Biological Farmers, Center for Undergraduate Teaching and Learning, Graduate Research Conference, Professional Agricultural Workers Conference</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>How Farmers Learn: Improving Sustainable Agriculture Education</td>
<td>Agriculture Administrators and Educators</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>How Farmers Learn: Improving Sustainable Agriculture Education Executive Summary</td>
<td>Agriculture educators, administrators and farmers</td>
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<tr>
<td>How Farmers Learn: Improving Sustainable Agriculture Education Funder Report</td>
<td>Funding directors and</td>
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Collecting and analyzing data

Five methods are most often used to collect data to determine the impact of the faculty member’s work: 1) case study, 2) observation, 3) focus group or individual interview, 4) secondary data, and 5) survey or questionnaire. A variety of methods should be used to triangulate the results. Faculty not familiar with these data collection methods should refer to the research methods and program evaluation literature for detailed descriptions.

Data analysis for engaged scholarship often includes the partner in the process. I enjoy conducting data parties where faculty, students, and partners come together for a day to celebrate the fruits of the project while jointly conducting data analysis. Food, decorations, and other celebratory items are often included in the event. The involvement of partners in the project often provides important nuances in the analysis that faculty alone would not discover (Franz, 2009b).

Telling the engaged scholarship story

For successful promotion and tenure, faculty must adeptly tell their engaged scholarship story to a wide variety of people. This requires removing disciplinary jargon and being very clear and concise about the engaged scholarship journey. There are three elements to an effective engaged scholarship story: 1) the relevance or why the issue or problem is important for the faculty
member to address, 2) the faculty member’s response to the issue or problem, and 3) the results of the effort and the future plans based on those results. This formula may be familiar to faculty since it is often used for news releases and annual reports. Faculty looking for detailed information on writing effective success stories should consult my online tutorial and fact sheet (Franz, 2011a & b).

**Dossier Review Criteria and Contextual Factors**

Several sets of engaged scholarship review criteria have been developed and found useful by faculty. The first set of criteria all faculty should review are those provided by their own institution. Then the faculty member should examine more general engagement criteria. These might include Glassick, Huber, and Maeroff’s (1997) criteria of the evidence of clear goals, adequate preparation, appropriate methods, significant results, effective presentation, and reflective critique. A faculty member may also consider Diamond and Adam’s (1995) criteria of high level of discipline-related experience, breaking new ground or innovation, ability to replicate or elaborate, documented, peer reviewed, and significant impact.

In addition to stated criteria for tenure and promotion, faculty must deeply consider their local context in determining how to design, implement, and document their engaged scholarship. They need to keep in mind how their institutional and departmental mission, methods of assessment, and strategic plan fit their work, the nature of their academic appointment (i.e. percent of time designated for teaching, research, and outreach) and the intended contribution to the discipline. Some faculty have also found that, “Ultimately, RPT decisions rest on values and judgments, not on measurement or clear expectations (Fairweather, 2002).”

**Best Practices**

My review of the literature and three decades of experience with tenure and promotion committees and processes has helped me identify a list of best practices for successful engaged
dossiers. The practices include:

- Start early - engagement takes time
- Ensure that documentation of efforts is an ongoing process, not just one or two points in time
- Write the dossier for an academic audiences
- Focus on the faculty role in the engagement work as well as the results of that work
- Find a balance between process and product impacts to report on
- Be clear about the intellectual question or working hypothesis behind the work
- Tell the significance of the impact and how it is determined or evaluated
- Align engagement work with the discipline, department, campus, and national priorities
- Share only the information that illustrates the context or scholarship
- Link current and past work with future intentions
- Select mentors and learn from them the criteria used for tenure and promotion reviews
- Know and follow the expected format for the dossier
- Get to know your dossier reviewers and their expectations
- Create a documentation file system to collect and organize dossier information and artifacts over time
- Develop a disciplinary, department, and eventually national and international niche
- Publish and present early and often
- Select service roles carefully and turn them into scholarship opportunities
- Make activities that matter a high priority in daily work (i.e. writing)
- Demonstrate value in all you do
- Stay focused in your work on your intellectual question or working hypothesis
- Be new, the first, or better than others at what you do
- Be aware of what influences faculty scholarly work and manage it (i.e. assignments, rewards, time, resources, personal priorities, performance review, promotion and tenure documents, culture)
- Engage many peer reviewers and mentors as you go
- Find ways to bridge the gaps between tenure expectations and the actual day to day work of being a faculty member
- Reach more than one goal with each activity or project to get maximum products out of each effort
- Know that if department and institutional requirements and values are different, faculty will have to address both
- The dossier needs to be organized so the reader can easily see all standards being addressed
- If engagement happened but there were no peer reviewed publications other scholarship should be described
• Write confidently but not arrogantly. Refrain from exaggerating, padding or overstating efforts.
• Include both a concise summary and a detailed narrative if standards allow this

Faculty will find following these best practices will serve them well in the tenure and promotion process.

**Concluding Remarks**

The growth of the engagement movement over the past two decades has resulted in more faculty interest and practice in engaged scholarship. As more institutions of higher education value this work, faculty are looking for ways to enhance the effectiveness of their engagement dossiers for promotion and tenure. The tips and tools provided here help faculty in this pursuit.

**Acknowledgments**

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**References**


### Approaches to Engagement and Scholarship

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHOLARSHIP</th>
<th>LOW</th>
<th>HIGH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Engagement  | • Mutual benefit  
• Exchange knowledge/resources  
• Reciprocal partnership |  
Engaged Scholarship  
Principles of engagement  
Principles of scholarship |
| Service     | • One way/expert presentation to groups  
• Internal committees  
• Professional associations |  
Scholarship  
• Original intellectual work  
• Communicated  
• Validated by peers |

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\(^1\) Information on concept maps can be found at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Concept_map](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Concept_map) and logic models at [http://www.uwex.edu/ces/pdande/evaluation/pdf/LMfront.pdf](http://www.uwex.edu/ces/pdande/evaluation/pdf/LMfront.pdf)

\(^2\) I prefer the term engaged pedagogy to show a reciprocal relationship between students and partners rather than service learning that may imply a one-way relationship.