Embedding Arizona State University in the Community

Briefing Packet
December 14, 2005
“Community engagement means putting the resources of the university to work in *reciprocal partnership with the community* with informed expectations of real consequences and real benefits which will lead to the *transformation not just of the community, but of the research, teaching, and service practices of the university.*”

- Victor Rubin, former director,
  Oakland Metropolitan Forum,
  UC Berkeley
Methodology

To better understand existing community engagement practices at universities across the country, Fern Tiger Associates used a number of different sources to gather preliminary data. Initially, the focus was on gathering general information about as many universities and colleges as possible, located in large cities or counties (those with populations somewhat similar to Phoenix, AZ, or key cities in each state.) In addition we included universities which appeared to be interesting study subjects due to:

- reputation for being active in community (based on referrals, personal experiences, literature search, etc.)
- founding principles and/or missions that would make some institutions more likely to work with and/or within their local or regional communities (such as land grant, Jesuit, or small, alternative liberal arts institutions)
- participation in university coalitions (such as the Urban 13/21; HUD COPC grantees, Kellogg Foundation grantees, etc.)

The initial cut yielded a working list of more than 170 schools, in 46 cities across the country (See “Selection Criteria - Tier One,” January 18, 2005 Report.) For each of these schools, information about the type of school (public/private), location (multiple campuses, urban setting, etc.), enrollment, number of faculty, mission and/or vision statements, and other miscellaneous data was gathered, primarily from the university’s web site. During this preliminary stage of research, any obvious display or mention of community engagement and partnership activity was noted.

The list was refined through a more involved examination of available data, including Kellogg Commission reports, recommendations from interviews with university and community members in Arizona, and discussions with university colleagues and community leaders across the country. Through this process, the 170 schools were narrowed to 55, forming the new group “Selection Criteria - Tier Two”). It was determined that this group of 55 warranted more research and information gathering.

The 55 colleges and universities were scrutinized more thoroughly to identify specific examples and definitions of community engagement, through Internet searches as well as literature and media reviews. Additionally, phone interviews with faculty and residents of many of the cities in the group helped to test the rigor of the selection. This examination, when compared to the interviews, showed numerous differences between the public relations-driven web content and the real world experiences of community residents and faculty.

A third cut (from among the 55) highlighted those universities that exhibited interesting examples of engagement and/or very strong mission/vision statements related to partnerships with community, “action research,” and involvement in local, regional, state issues. This effort narrowed the field to approximately 30 universities and colleges, prompting yet additional research on these remaining universities of interest, including a LexisNexis search for the past two years - revealing some of the acknowledged and publicized ways in which universities and communities interact, both positively and
negatively.

We also reviewed articles from academic and foundation journals and reports in order to determine which schools warranted site visits. Over the course of the visits to 15 schools, additional suggestions by people we interviewed were added. (None of these “additional” schools have been visited yet.) It should be noted that at several universities, particular departments and/or “centers” became the focus of the visit, based on the structure and organization of each university. In general, two days were spent at each site. In most cities, we tried to meet with at least one community leader or organization (city planning director, head of major nonprofit, etc.) in addition to interviewees within the university community.

The mini-reports on each school reflect a combination of information gathered from available research (confirmed as best as possible through conversations and site visits) and from one-on-one, in-person interviews. They attempt to describe programs, explain the structure and depth of engagement, note particular points of accomplishment, uncover any distinct impetus that spurred the creation of a program or changed the direction of a school, and provide some rationale for the successes and challenges faced by each institution.
The Colleges and Universities
(Bold Face = First Site Visit Completed)

- Georgia State University  
  Atlanta, Georgia
- Georgia Institute of Technology  
  Atlanta, Georgia
- University of Texas  
  Austin, Texas
- University of Maryland, Baltimore  
  Baltimore, Maryland
- University of Baltimore  
  Baltimore, Maryland
- University of California, Berkeley  
  Berkeley, California
- Tufts University (To Do)  
  Boston, Massachusetts
- Northeastern University (To Do)  
  Boston, Massachusetts
- University of Illinois, Chicago  
  Chicago, Illinois
- University of Cincinnati (Zimpher)  
  Cincinnati, Ohio
- Ohio State University  
  Columbus, Ohio
- Wayne State University  
  Detroit, Michigan
- Trinity College  
  Hartford, Connecticut
- University of Hawaii at Manoa  
  Honolulu, Hawaii
- University of Indiana/Purdue University (UIPUI)  
  Indianapolis, Indiana
- University of Southern California  
  Los Angeles, California
- Occidental College  
  Los Angeles, California
- University of California, Los Angeles  
  Los Angeles, California
- Memphis State University  
  Memphis, Tennessee
- University of Wisconsin/Milwaukee  
  Milwaukee, Wisconsin
- University of Minnesota, Twin Cities  
  Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota
- University of Pennsylvania  
  Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
- Portland State University  
  Portland, Oregon
- University of San Diego (To Do)  
  San Diego, California
- San Diego State University (To Do)  
  San Diego, California
- University of Washington  
  Seattle, Washington
- Syracuse University  
  Syracuse, New York
- Winona State University (Ramaly)  
  Winona, Minnesota

1 Added to the list because the initiator of the Great Cities Initiative at University of Illinois, Chicago relocated to accept the position of provost at University of Baltimore.
Universities and Communities – Allies and Adversaries
A Story in 15 Parts (11 Cities; 15 Universities)

Across the country, urban universities have recognized the need and importance of “engagement” with local communities as well as the potential it offers to change the way local people and institutions think about resources and relationships. For at least the last 15 years, a wide variety of university-based community engagement “experiments” have been undertaken in nearly every major city and at every major university, including ASU. As ASU embarks on a planning process intended to lead to increased “embeddedness” in the greater Phoenix metropolitan area (and more specifically in the communities ASU calls “home”: Tempe, Mesa, Glendale, and Phoenix), there is much to learn from the experiences of other universities across the country.

As part of its work with ASU, Fern Tiger Associates surveyed the state of university-community relations around the U.S. This included research on more than 40 colleges and universities (or particular programs at these universities) and site visits to interview key players at 15 of these institutions. (See Methodology, page 1.21.)

Disclaimer
It is important to note what this preliminary report on university-community relations is and what it is not. This is not a comprehensive literature search. It is not an “academic” research document. It is a summary based on preliminary research and on-site interviews with approximately five to ten individuals affiliated with each institution or the community in which the university resides. The interviews were all informal (with questions developed specifically for each meeting), preceded by information gathering and preliminary phone discussions with people from each university and city. The report reflects neither a comprehensive assessment, nor a full-blown “story” of the activities and involvement of any of the institutions in their community. It is, however, an indication and reflection of programs, structures, successes, and challenges of the colleges and universities included in this survey of 15 schools – which in no way an indication of the extent of meaningful engagement occurring on the thousands of college campuses that comprise the field of higher education in the U.S.3

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2 University of California, LA; University of Southern California; Occidental College, LA; UC, Berkeley; Portland State University; University of Washington, Seattle; University of Minnesota, Twin Cities; University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee; University of Illinois, Chicago; Georgia State University, Atlanta; Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta; Trinity College, Hartford, CT; University of Baltimore; University of Maryland, Baltimore; and University of Pennsylvania. Of these institutions, 12 are large (more than 20,000 students); 10 are publicly funded; five are private; six are land grant colleges; all are located in major metropolitan areas.

3 At every university visited – especially the large universities – we were told of additional programs, and of uniquely focused ‘centers’ that did not show up through our research and preliminary discussions. While many of these projects and centers are, no doubt, of interest and doing meaningful work – for the most part they appear to be stand-alone entities (albeit some quite sustainable through endowments) and less integrated into university-wide structures than the programs we studied.
Since all of the interviews (approximately 70) were conducted by one interviewer, the information gathered and the questions posed became an iterative process with more comparative points and probably more in-depth analysis occurring as our understanding and experience developed. In most instances, interviewees at each institution included the university provost (or vice provost, dean of faculty, etc.), deans and/or key faculty, directors of community-based learning, directors of core “centers,” university community relations/public affairs directors and a sampling of community leaders and/or city officials.

**Comprehensive Engagement: A Three-Legged Stool**

If we think of “engagement” or “embeddedness” as three legs of a stool – community capacity building; curricular change based on academic commitment to local social issues and problem solving; and community-focused economic development – it’s easy to see that almost every university visited pays at least lip service to all three of the legs, but examples of universities that do all of these well are few and far between. Even less obvious are examples where a comprehensive approach to all three appears to be intentional. None appear to have fully integrated all three components in any sustained way nor unified their efforts with a comprehensive research link.

**Building the capacity of communities** requires sustained engagement efforts – informed and reinforced by ongoing trust and true two-way communication between and among the university and the community. Most important, for communities and community-based organizations to mature and become capable and effective enough to be real partners with long-standing institutions like universities, they need support, training, and access to resources and information that can enable them to become more sophisticated and self-sufficient.

**Teaching and learning** are at the heart of every university’s mission. The institution’s core values are evidenced in faculty hiring criteria, tenure requirements, and the nature of coursework offered for students. Curricular change that reflects an institutional commitment to civic values and social responsibility; that prepares students to be valued members, indeed the backbone of a civil society; and that sustains involvement of faculty and students in problemsolving for core issues facing communities is the internal manifestation of a university’s sustained commitment to meaningful engagement. Often, this entails a major cultural shift within the university. If today’s college graduates are to be positive influences and constructive actors locally, nationally, and globally, they need to be more than just “educated.” They need to realize that they are members of a community – often the privileged members – with an obligation to participate in and contribute to civic life. Perhaps most important, they should understand and work for the common good of the community and be able to do so effectively.

For large urban universities, **economic development and investment in local communities** have become “givens” – be it the purchase of property adjacent to the campus or the recognition that the institution is a major local employer. The question is whether a university is prepared to evaluate its approach and hold itself to the high standards its community deserves. Universities need to ask whether planned economic development initiatives respond both to the needs of the institution and the needs of
the community, and whether these efforts can be sustained over time. When representatives of the community are included early – in both program planning and oversight – and when the university treats communities and community organizations as true partners that add value to the university’s mission, projects are more likely to meet significant needs for both sides. For example, local neighborhood development that neither gentrifies the surrounding community nor displaces long-time residents requires a commitment of time and resources beyond simply attracting retailers to the surrounding neighborhood, or redeveloping brownfields for university housing.

All of the universities we visited acknowledge the importance of all three legs of the stool, and all are challenged to do all of them credibly and effectively. Missing a leg, the university is unlikely to topple, but the commitment to community engagement is sure to be flawed and transitory.

Finally, universities that are committed to true, multi-dimensional civic engagement are struggling both to merge their work in the community into their research agenda, and to develop appropriate measurements to evaluate success. Despite the interest, little appears to have been done in this arena, with funding constraints cited most frequently as the reason why this important part of the work is missing.

**Market Forces and the University**

_The powerful impact of commodification and commercialism on distorting what higher education is for, so that it’s education for economic success, it’s large deals and financial betterment to the institution unrelated to purposes of democracy and community…this makes our work very hard to do._

— Ira Harkavy, University of Pennsylvania

As government funding declines for higher education and university research, and as the gap between tuition payments and the cost of a university education grows, universities are forced into a business model that prioritizes internal efficiency and partnerships with wealthy corporations while it de-emphasizes work with community collaborators and the learn-by-doing approach that can make community-based instruction rich, rewarding, and transformative for both students and CBOs.

This is why an effective and sustainable community engagement program should be based on a vision and values that are developed and articulated in partnership between the university and the community. In fact, the concept of “community” needs to be expanded to include both the university and its city. Commitment to the goal of integrating the transformation of a city with the transformation of a university (by understanding the needs of neighbors and the city as integral to the needs of the university) must extend beyond the president or chancellor to the trustees or board of regents, to faculty, students, local elected officials, and to community leaders. Both the university’s budget line and the reporting authority for an engagement initiative should exist separately from the budget lines for public relations/public affairs, and economic development activities.
Apples and Broccoli Don’t Make Soup.

Unfortunately, “community engagement” is sometimes used by a university as a vehicle to accomplish other institutional goals. Because engagement does indeed take many forms and play many roles within the institution as well as in the community, it is tempting to aggregate diverse forms of community relations—participation in municipal planning processes related to zoning, land use, or permitting needed by the university; service learning coursework; student volunteer activities; campus events open to the public (e.g., arts, theater, sports); advocacy/government relations; public relations or external affairs; staff recruitment; and charity work— and call it a comprehensive engagement initiative. What is missing in such an exercise is the creation of a strategic blueprint for those aspects of collaborative engagement that aim to transform both the university and the community. Each of the university’s community partners and external “audiences” has different informational and programmatic needs and defines progress differently. Community organizers, activists, and advocates will easily see through a self-serving collection of university programs that calls itself engagement but misses the community’s mark—creating confusion and mistrust of the university’s motives.

Similarly, while “service learning” is a buzzword that appeals to many who would de-emphasize the ivory tower, service learning in its traditional form is designed to benefit students by broadening their experience and exposing them to diverse segments of society. (The term is seen in a negative light by many academics). Community-based learning and teaching, designed to recognize the shared nature of social problems and to partner with the community to solve them (or to change the university’s culture in profound ways, is rare among the universities we visited). Several of them, however, sensitive to the patronizing frame of the word “service,” have abandoned the service learning moniker in favor of “Atlanta-based learning” (GSU), “community-based learning” (OXY), or “the Joint Educational Project” (USC). At GSU faculty support for the concept grew notably when the name was changed.

Sustainability: Starting Up Is Easier Than Maintaining.

 Numerous community engagement programs and initiatives that showed great promise at the outset appear to have lost momentum over time. Hypotheses abound for this phenomenon. Were they established by charismatic leadership that left the scene (UMW, UCB)? Was there a structural reason why programs lost funding support (Trinity, UWM, UCB)? Was there a failure to convince critical partners, or win over a critical mass of the faculty? Has society—and more importantly, funders—moved on from the post-1960s concern with the social problems that still plague inner cities and with the belief in the 1990s that urban universities could be key instigators for social change and support for community development? Was the start-up more enticing, more exciting, and easier than the work entailed in building sustainability?

The most successful and effective “programs” appear to incorporate a constellation of initiatives aimed at changing the culture of both a university and its community. In various combinations these include elements such as service (or “community-based”) learning; sustained involvement in local public schools; mentoring and scholarship programs for local applicants for admission; curriculum
development grants for faculty; competitive review of project proposals from faculty-community partnerships; recognition programs for faculty, students, community members, and community organizations; etc. Each university can point to numerous interesting, effective projects and programs.

Over time, natural selection tends to winnow the field of surviving initiatives, especially at those universities where the development of “engagement” has happened piecemeal, lacking a comprehensive plan for broad-based implementation. Sustainability of the concept and the reality of community engagement is easier to achieve for universities that endow their initiatives with academic credibility (through faculty involvement and ties to academic units as well as the provost). Also critical is the strong and visible support of the leadership of the university and a governance structure that has both programmatic flexibility and some degree of funding discretion.

It is unlikely that these attributes will come together willy-nilly, however good the intentions of those charged with assembling the initiative. A comprehensive planning process in which the community participates as an equal partner with university faculty and administrators has the advantage of adding both visibility and credibility to the initiative as it builds in safeguards against strategic omissions. The plan should identify key constituencies and a sequence and timetable for bringing them into the program: deans, professors, and students; university administrators including those with responsibility for finance and development; community partners including CBOs and the business community; and local government decision makers.

The plan needs to recognize the incremental nature of true cultural change. It needs to build in oversight that includes university and community partners on equal footing, as well as benchmarks for evaluation and revisiting the way to move forward.

The Critical Moment: Tragedy, Serendipity, and Foresight

Each university can point to an event or series of events over which the university had no control, a crisis in the neighborhood (Penn, Trinity, USC), or a university-driven need (UWM, PSU, UIC, GSU) that prompted the creation of a new engagement ethic and an attempt to change the culture to greater participation (and often influence) in the community. On occasion, the impetus has been the arrival of a new leader at the university who either recognizes the value of engagement for students and for the institution, or holds a conviction that the institution should be a model for social responsibility (OXY, PSU).

Indeed, university involvement in communities seems to have come about late, perhaps reflecting the internal inertia and bureaucratic structure of universities, and their inherent and historical detachment from the real life of communities. Surely it is not a coincidence that the rise of urban university-community partnerships as a hot topic among academics, foundations, and government agencies came at the same time that inner cities were crumbling, crime was increasing, and central city property values were falling. In numerous instances it was urban decay and violence in the university’s immediate neighborhood that moved administrators or trustees to embrace community engagement—and devote resources to it—as a last-ditch effort to keep enrollment up and pacify the parents of future applicants (USC, Trinity, Penn).
The open question in each case seems to have been whether “community engagement” was going to be defined as local economic development that enhances the quality of life for the university community and its immediate neighborhood, or as a comprehensive, multi-modal effort to change—for generations to come—the culture of the university and the community of which it is a part. Regardless of the situational driver behind the new engagement initiative, the moment of motivation and decision is an opportunity to embark on a truly transformative new course.

**Converting the Faculty to Cultural Change**

It should be a truism that when academic transformation is a goal, converting the faculty to the cause of community engagement becomes a primary objective. This point deserves special emphasis, however, in light of the many failures—on the part of otherwise well-conceived engagement efforts—to win over a critical mass of faculty before personnel changes at the top alter the institutional commitment to community partnerships or curricular change. Meanwhile, the age-old traditions of the academy continue to discourage younger faculty who would like to incorporate work with community partners into their teaching, but who also need to gain tenure and stature in their disciplines. Local tenure decisions and hiring by other universities are generally based on traditional benchmarks for academic accomplishment: quality of research and the ability to attract grant funding to support it; peer-reviewed scholarly publication, and (often to a lesser degree) quality of teaching.

For numerous reasons, addition of a community engagement criterion to the promotion and tenure checklist has been an elusive goal at most, if not all, universities. Yet all agree this is key to cultural change. A tenure requirement should be accompanied by ongoing efforts to educate the faculty about recognizing and responding to the true needs of the community. There is a significant difference between research that addresses a real and pressing need and research that simply quantifies or elaborates on a local problem without incorporating inquiry into potential solutions.

The second-choice alternative to status is...money. All of the schools and centers with viable, ongoing engagement programs have shown their commitment through an investment of resources—staffing, cash grants to faculty for course syllabus revision or community-based research (USC, GSU, PSU), stipends for graduate students, funds to a school or department that applies for support for community partnership projects, reduction or elimination of overhead typically applied to grant funds, facilitated faculty roundtables, or funds to develop proposals for community-based research. Some universities have created recognition programs that include permanent salary step increases as rewards (UMinn). Programs can be structured to provide incentives for faculty and community groups to develop relationships and plan joint projects prior to application for funds (UCLA). They can also add academic cachet by designating successful faculty proposers as “fellows” or “scholars” and more important by “buying out” the faculty member’s teaching responsibilities to engage in significant community-related work.

If such incentives are to work, funding as well as administrative support must be predictable and sustained. Success is likely to be incremental, but institutional cultural change can result over time.
Organization Matters

Decisions about the structural arrangements for community engagement have important consequences for program impetus, design, and sustainability, although one can argue all sides of the question whether more resilience is gained by creating a “program” (UWM, UCB, Trinity) under the protection of the university president or vice president (UCLA); or under the provost (UWashington, GSU, USC, UB) or within an academic college, school, or department (UIC, UCB); or whether a stand-alone center (such as the Shriver Center at UMBC) has advantages in terms of fundraising and flexibility. Either the “program” or “center” approach has the potential to become marginalized as its existence communicates the notion that community engagement initiatives are either being taken care of by someone else, or separate from the academic mission of the university.

Locating an engagement initiative within the office of the president or vice president (UWM, UMinn) lends an air of credibility and sometimes helps to secure a permanent line in the budget. But the flip side of the presidential credibility is the up-for-grabs fate of the program when the president leaves the university, unless ample provisions have been made for continuity and sustainability. It appears to help when the person at the head of the engagement initiative has an elevated title such as vice president or associate vice president (Ira Harkavy at Penn, Bill Fritz at GSU, and Frank Gilliam at UCLA.) Still, priorities and commitments change as administrations come and go.

An “academic home” for coordinated engagement activities, within a particular college (UIC) might have some advantages in gaining support from deans, which is seen as critical for faculty participation, but it also tends to marginalize participation from other departments across the campus.

While most universities raise the issue of working with (or around) their public affairs (or community/public relations, external affairs) departments, there was fairly unanimous consensus that being affiliated with a university’s pre-existing external affairs departments conflicts with the intention of community engagement and embeddedness. (It should be noted that The Milwaukee Idea hired its own press and media professional to both promote the initiative and to document it.)

In fact, no two universities we surveyed have the same organizational structure. In many cases the engagement “initiative” brought together (nominally, anyway) at least a few (or in some cases, many) existing programs from different corners of the university (sometimes, renaming the pre-existing center or program/project – “Old wine, new bottles,” according to one director) and added new programs. In some universities the program was initiated in either the chancellor’s, president’s, or provost’s office (UWM’s Milwaukee Idea, UIC’s Great Cities Initiative, Trinity, GSU) and moved to an academic department, often after a personnel change at the top. Only at Portland State University is the ethic of engagement so broad-based and accepted as part of the university’s core mission that it doesn’t appear to have, or to need, a structural niche. In every case, even at PSU and at the two smaller colleges visited, identifying and coordinating all of the diverse community projects being undertaken by academic units and individual professors is a continuing struggle and challenge.

In defining the structure of a new initiative it is critical to evaluate the particular barriers to success internal to the university, and devise an organization strategy that addresses those issues.
Marketing and Promoting Engagement Initiatives:
*What's in a name? Who delivers the message?*

If I show a certain spirit now and then, which may seem to cloud my judgment as to certain matters herein contained, I crave the reader's pardon on the score that I, a wandering student, seeking knowledge, came knocking at the gates of the great University of Wisconsin, and it took me in, filled me with inspiration, and when I left its doors, the kindly people of the state stretched out welcoming hands and gave me a man's work to do.

— Charles McCarthy, The Wisconsin Idea, 1912

In a few universities (UWM, PSU, Penn), a strong and charismatic president or chancellor with a deep personal commitment to community engagement devised an outreach approach to cultural change within the university and very public adoption of a new engagement ethos. The two elements of this approach are the quality of leadership and the “branding” of the initiative.

UIC’s Great Cities Initiative (later the Great Cities Institute, now also the Great Cities Commitment) UWM’s The Milwaukee Idea, and UCLA in LA were all launched with great fanfare and a public announcement of intention to transform the university and the city. The Great Cities brand was developed by a public relations firm brought in to help brand and define the university in the college-rich city of Chicago. UCLA’s moniker and logo for its very focused and small program, UCLA in LA, is visible on banners and well-designed print materials. In Milwaukee, regardless of how deep the understanding of the separate initiatives has been, there is high recognition of the name, The Milwaukee Idea—a contemporary spin off The Wisconsin Idea, a statewide initiative in 1912.

These “Big Bang” strategies have benefits, at least in the short term, but appear to be difficult to sustain over time. It appears that several of The Milwaukee Idea’s original 10 initiatives have lost critical momentum since the departure of Chancellor Nancy Zimpher, the charismatic leader who energized the university and the city around her plan for engagement by the university. The problem may have been that she did not lay enough groundwork to win over a critical mass of the faculty before she left or that her personal energy, magnetism, and tireless promotion of The Milwaukee Idea were too personally connected to the concept that it could not be sustained after her departure.

In fact the departure of the president/chancellor who championed the new initiative appears to have had a deleterious effect on many of the programs reviewed in this report. Least impacted by a personnel change at the top appear to be University of Pennsylvania, Portland State University, and Trinity College. An incremental approach appears to be merited, especially in a situation where neither the faculty nor the community has a tradition of broad-based mutual engagement. It should be possible to hybridize the tortoise and the hare, and time the external announcement to take place after the faculty has moved well along toward acceptance of internal cultural change.
COMMUNITY CAPACITY BUILDING

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT / INVESTMENT

TEACHING AND LEARNING

University

Research

Research

Research
In Summary: What does a sustainable community engagement commitment look like?

The university has a stake in the well-being of the democracy. The values we cherish in the university are really the values of a thriving democracy.

Faculty pay attention to three things: funding, their disciplinary and professional associations, and the reward structure. And in fact, the reward system in which most faculty operate doesn’t have much to do with community engagement. How to change this? You’ve got to go outside your own department, your own university. Getting the national academic and professional associations to begin to recognize the importance of engaged research helps to begin to change the culture. In fact, those organizations do pay attention to the civic impact of their work. It just doesn’t quite percolate down in the right way. More work needs to be done.

Public engagement tends to be pigeonholed as “public scholarship,” service learning, or outreach. We have fought against confining the notion of engagement to any one of those things. To us it’s an institution-wide commitment that affects scholarship, teaching, and learning, and the way you engage with the community. It’s not only that you engage, it’s the way you engage. Partnerships become critical here. And partnerships are a deeper form of engagement than providing services to the community.

The Diverse Nature of University-Community Engagement

Campus/community partnerships are described in a variety of frames and terms in higher education. Within the nomenclature, civic engagement, community engagement, civic responsibility, action research, and “the engaged campus” are used most commonly. All imply partnerships that involve teaching, research, and active relationships with communities and community organizations or agencies. Programmatically, community engagement initiatives may include long-term commitment of academic resources and faculty/student time to local public education or public health initiatives; establishment of university-community centers that conduct community- or policy-based research; incentives and/or recognition programs designed to engender and encourage faculty-community partnerships; community-related courses and capstones; and incentives for faculty to engage in community-based projects, teach courses with service learning components, or revisit course syllabi.

Community engagement initiatives are variously led and supported from a university’s central administration (the president’s or chancellor’s office), from the office of the Provost, from a research center within a college or school, or from a free-standing center or institute housed within the university. The locus of the effort appears to be consequential for credibility, sustainability, funding, and for gaining faculty support.

Administration-led community engagement often encompasses a host of economic development
initiatives intended to further community interests on an equal footing with university self-interest; procurement and staff hiring policies that give preference to local residents and businesses; and scholarship programs that target disadvantaged local youth.

Academically-led engagement initiatives tend to focus on research and in making the time, energy, and expertise of faculty and students either available to the community to address community-driven and defined needs or for research or experiential learning activities that come about through active collaboration between communities and academics. When community-based learning (service learning, experiential learning) is incorporated into academic course work it generally involves some form of relationship-building with community as well as academic reflection from students. It could include hands-on activities in communities, but might only involve observation or “shadowing.” Some universities have begun to require capstones (senior projects) that also are community-based.

The universities with the broadest and best-established community engagement commitment (PSU, UWM, Trinity, UIC) have multiple types of engagement happening at the same time, often in different places throughout the university. Such a broad-based commitment requires significant resources to identify and coordinate all of the ongoing efforts, and to maintain and nurture continuing collaboration with the community.

A very different category of engagement happens when administrators and individual faculty and staff participate in local civic life – living in close proximity to the university, participating on neighborhood or municipal commissions, and impacting policymaking as individuals, rather than as representatives of the university. Civic involvement by individuals identified with the university can help build a positive image of the institution in the community. It also models active participation in democracy for students and decreases the university’s arrogance quotient, mentioned frequently by community leaders who are skeptical of a university’s commitment and who question its understanding of community issues.

A word of warning: there is a crucial distinction to be made between truly engaged coursework planned jointly by the community and the faculty, and faculty-driven research agendas developed before the community is invited to participate. Similarly, universities often sponsor volunteer activities which, while providing free labor, do not foster long-term relationships with communities and continue the charity model, rather than the capacity-building model. This has created tension between communities and academics.

**Why engage? The motivation and interests of the university and the community**

In every instance, a university’s fresh commitment to community engagement – generally accompanied by much internal discussion and in some instances, external fanfare – has been spurred and driven by a perceived need for change. The two most common precipitating conditions are a significant economic or social crisis in the immediate neighborhood (Penn, USC, GSA, Trinity), or the need to carve out an academic niche in a university-rich environment (PSU, UIC, GSA). Land-grant affiliation is helpful, but not essential, in justifying a costly and labor-intensive turn toward community.
While a university embarking on a new engagement initiative undoubtedly has specific needs which it clearly understands, it may not understand the needs of the community at all. Generally the community has been thinking about its needs for a long time, since addressing them requires resources that are not available (otherwise the needs would be met). In many if not most communities the local university is perceived as a monolithic and immovable institution that comes down from its ivory tower only when it needs something from the community, like planning permission.

The reputation of many – especially large – academic institutions is that they are cut off from the very people who have real knowledge (experience-based, “non-book” knowledge) about community. Community-based activists, especially, feel that their knowledge could enrich the learning of students. But the gap between communities and universities perpetuates the insularity of many academics – even those who purport to be studying communities and community development – and separates communities, community-based practitioners, and organizations from the often strong and relevant research that is done by academics. The two cultures just don’t come together very often. Bridging the gap is the primary responsibility of the university, because it can easily enter the open doors of the community, while communities have a difficult time finding their way into the university.

In this psychological environment building trust, gaining cooperation, and working toward collaboration with neighborhood and community organizations is both critical and time-consuming. In fact, if the university is sincere when it says, “We want to engage the community,” it is really presenting a blank slate to local groups. The very nature of engagement will be different in different cities with different community issues and resources. After identifying its own needs and priorities it is up to the university (which is committing time and treasure to build a relationship with its surroundings) to listen and learn from its potential new partners and then work with them to identify mutual self-interest.

**Lessons drawn from university visits: potential barriers to effective, lasting engagement**

- Interviews conducted with representatives of diverse institutions reveal conflicting views of the effectiveness of creating a separate “center” focused on community issues and community-based research. There is a compelling argument that the creation of such a center essentially lets the rest of the university off the hook, as in, “Community engagement is being taken care of over there, so we don’t have to bother about it.”

- Campus communities with a history of volunteering and “good works” may take some time and indoctrination to learn how to move beyond “service” to a genuine two-way, mutually beneficial relationship with the surrounding community. There is a corollary temptation to allow the interest of the university to dominate, or to “serve” the community in ways that are essentially paternalistic or imperialistic. A collaborative planning process in which community voices are on a par with the university should be helpful in combating this tendency, although this can be difficult for are institution which is not as “process-oriented” as community groups.

- Non-coordinated, independent engagement initiatives or research projects by different faculty in different departments and colleges may duplicate efforts and create confusion or even distrust.
in the community. However, coordination – even creating a comprehensive data base or clearing house – is complicated, difficult, and requires ongoing attention and support and related resources.

- Faculty buy-in is critical and essential to any broad-based engagement, especially if it is to involve the most valuable resource of the university – research and new ways to think about teaching young people who will ultimately play leadership roles in communities. In different universities, in different cities, with different degrees of faculty participation both in university governance and in local civic affairs, different strategies for obtaining faculty support will be more or less effective. But in all cases where faculty participation is high and supported beyond the initial attention of the president, faculty were engaged early on and in some unique ways (PSU).

- Faculty and universities that are lionized and rewarded for their work on international/global issues may see themselves as resources for “larger” dimensions than the local scene.

- Faculty may be less likely to support and participate in community engagement initiatives if the initiatives are driven by the administration without evidence of strong ties to teaching and research. Such administration-driven programs are often seen as “fluff,” lacking the rigor of academically involved projects and programs. Involvement of deans and academic department heads in planning, implementation, and evaluation is essential.

- Unless tenure criteria specifically include engagement or community-based research, younger, non-tenured faculty may be difficult to recruit for community partnerships, as engagement is often seen as antithetical to substantive research. Similarly, successfully involved departments need to work with professional organizations to increase the visibility of engagement as a powerful research and teaching model. (UM/Sociology)

- Universities need to understand the high risks involved with commitment to community. Universities often use soft money to create programs on which communities rely. When the funding is reduced or eliminated, the university is faced with few options, but community expectations have already been raised and the “bad guy” is the one who pulled the plug, not the one who set the budget.

- Understanding the complexities and dynamic nature of communities is a truly interdisciplinary undertaking. Many research universities have long standing biases against cross-disciplinary work, as they encourage faculty to attain prominence in a particular discipline.

- Universities have done little to produce the knowledge base or the people with the skills needed to help communities and nonprofits. Very few community leaders would point to their university education as being the basis for their understanding of and desire to participate with communities.

- While the inclusion of community foci can be handled by many faculty, not all faculty members are temperamentally suited for community-involved work or research. Individuals who appear
arrogant and “unknowledgeable” despite possessing key information and knowledge about the community in question might do best performing background research.

- Communities generally perceive the university as capable of getting whatever it wants from the city, the state, etc. They do not see the university as vulnerable – which is how they see themselves.

**Lessons drawn from university visits: successful strategies**

- Early recognition and intentionality about a new mandate for cultural change may be helpful in anticipating the slow, evolutionary nature of a “campaign” to institute such a change. (Kellogg research indicates a minimum of eight years.)

- Consistent, vocal support from the president or chancellor is essential. This means a focus at events such as new faculty orientations, graduation ceremonies, events for incoming students, and presentations in the community as well as on campus. However, it is important to ensure that there is widespread buy-in, understanding, and support so that the “words” translate to commitment and to operation. It is important to note that change of personnel at the top is the most often cited reason why a successful and potentially sustainable initiative begins to slip. Building in sustainability that is not personality-dependent is one of the great challenges.

- Expressions of the university’s interest in, support of, and intentional direction toward involvement should be evidenced on the university’s web site (UIC, Trinity) and should be part of the mission of the university at the highest level of recognition (not buried on the third page). Similarly, the university’s own strategic plan should have goals set for engagement – university-wide, and by department.

- While university visits did not reveal real strategic planning for a long-term future, such planning (possibly even in conjunction with the community would go a long way to anticipate the future, availability of resources, etc.

- Identifying faculty who are already involved in community-based research or service learning, and including them in early planning and oversight – especially if they are well-respected academic leaders – as well as asking them to champion engagement with their peers, can give the new initiative an important boost with the rest of the faculty.

- Over time, a university that has established and made broadly public an institution-wide ethos of community engagement will attract new faculty who are predisposed to community-based teaching and research and a student body interested in becoming informed leaders. At that point, the university has been transformed and no longer needs to “sell” its new ethos.

- Community-based learning programs (a.k.a. “service learning”) that are sequential, that include linked series of courses related to the theory and practice of community engagement, or that build on previous work should be developed and made attractive to students, faculty, and
community partners.

- True partnership with the community requires a deep understanding of the local CBO/NGO environment, local resources for neighborhood-based activist/advocacy groups, and local government structures that often include bonafide neighborhood-level entities (Seattle, Minneapolis, Atlanta, Oakland.)

- Universities can support community engagement efforts by waiving overhead fees for grants obtained by faculty, programs, or departments to support work with community partners.

**Specific Examples from Universities Visited**

- Georgia State’s RFP process for Freshman Learning Centers (multi-disciplinary clusters of academic courses focused on local topics—“Atlanta-based Learning”)

- Georgia Tech’s commitment to its adjacent community (as evidenced in its master plan and strategic plan) that it will not encroach on the neighborhood, despite its aggressive land banking and growth plans

- Strong recognition at University of Maryland, Baltimore County of differences between experiential learning, internships, volunteerism, and the development of a graduate program specifically designed to encourage and prepare participants for leadership positions in communities and governments

- UCB’s willingness to take risks, to invest substantial funds, and to bring together the very top university officials, electeds, and corporate leaders

- UIC-GCI’s branding, presence on the university’s website, and the commitment to community inserted into the mission statement

- Trinity’s intensely engaged service learning program and massive financial commitment to revitalization and to the development of The Learning Corridor

- USC’s definition of ‘neighborhood’ as a tightly defined area surrounding the campus, enabling activities and results to be evident

- OXY’s patience

- UCLA’s focused relationship with small nonprofits across the city, and its private funding

- UWM’s engagement process that kicked off The Milwaukee Idea’s ten initiatives; the president’s pledge of financial support; pulling together existing programs under a single banner

- UM’s Council on Public Engagement, its reward system, and establishment of college liaisons to spread the message

- PSU’s faculty-driven process to integrate engagement and city-focused research
Hallmarks of Sustainability

• Public commitment and involvement of top administration leadership (the president, chancellor, or strong provost) is critical for a university-wide community engagement ethic to take hold.

• A multi-level strategy, including economic development activities, community-based research, and community-related coursework, is essential for sustainability.

• The best community research programs are truly interdisciplinary – which benefits students as well as community partners.

• Initiatives that target specific, community-identified problem areas for work and study – rather than simply funding random proposals from faculty or the community – offer greater opportunities for grant funding, longevity of projects, and significant problem-solving in the community.

• Evaluation strategies that are realistic and tailored to prescribed definitions of success, the conditions in the community, and the duration of the project will be more effective than numerical tallies or benchmarking. “You can have systematic evidence of a non-quantitative nature if it is gathered from all your units, including comparable information. . . . It’s a powerful kind of evidence. It may be more powerful than some of the quantitative data.”

Specific Examples of Sustainability

• GSU’s course “credit” accounting/allocation system (rewarding departments whose faculty participate in Freshman Learning Centers) and the evolutionary development of Freshman Learning Centers and Atlanta-Based Learning.

• UMB’s endowed Shriver Center

• UIC’s permanent funding through the state legislature.

• USC’s CCR

• Cultures and Communities at UWM

• Penn’s Center for Community Partnerships

• Portland’s State’s capacity to integrate the community agenda into coursework, programs, and administrative decisionmaking without any apparent need for a “leader” to guide sustainability
Recommended Practices for Successful University/Community Partnership

• Make sure a critical mass of faculty – and if appropriate the faculty senate – are on board before announcing the initiative to the public.

• Clearly define, through a joint, collaborative university-community planning process, what community engagement and “partnership” mean to the both the university and the community.

• Design a mission/vision statement for the university that respects and incorporates the community’s agenda.

• Create a cohesive program agenda linked to local needs identified and articulated by the community. For example, focus on housing, education, health.

• Extend the university’s core educational mission into the community, by jointly developing relevant courses and opening them to neighborhood residents as well as community leaders.

• Get people accustomed to understanding what the university’s intentions are and to the terminology being used, and to the reality that this is a long term commitment.

• Determine the most appropriate structure for engagement within the university, such that it will integrate as broadly as possible, have credibility for academic units, and have the greatest chance for long term sustainability.

• Seek a permanent funding stream or a small endowment to ensure long term sustainability.

• Participate in the national dialogue about engagement and consider hosting inter- and intra-university discussions on best practices.

• Design an ongoing assessment/evaluation mechanism to monitor efforts and inform practice.

• While leadership is required from the top of the university to guide – but not dictate – the tone, vision, culture, and implementation of community engagement programs, support from other top power-brokers (e.g. regents, business leaders, elected officials) is also critical.

Other Points to Consider

• Completely administrative-driven community engagement programs produce minimal buy-in from faculty, and programs are not sustainable.

• Universities that have a large number of in-state and local students and that were started as smaller (mostly non-research) institutions often have an easier time incorporating community engagement and having reputations for being part of the communities they serve.

• The university’s website can make finding information about the community and about its engagement practices and programs easy to find. The university can also create links to neighborhood- and community-based organizations’ home pages.

• Be sure that the university’s strategic plan carefully supports community engagement as both
an academic and institutional transformation component.

- Create a mechanism for individuals throughout the university to exchange information and collaborate across departments. That may mean centralizing activities through one office.