

UNIVERSITY OF WYOMING

*The task of the university is the creation of the future,
so far as rational thought, and civilized modes of appreciation, can affect the issue.*

Alfred North Whitehead

Pythian Papers on Academic Careers

Best Practices for

CONSIDERING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AS A COMPONENT OF ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

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CONSIDERING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AS A COMPONENT OF ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

At the heart of community engagement is the partnership between colleges and universities and the local and surrounding communities where both partners are deeply committed to sharing and disseminating knowledge and resources. Such a partnership thrives when both members are engaged in activities that enrich scholarship, research, and creative activity; that foster innovative pedagogy and teaching and learning practice; and that seek to develop educated and engaged citizens.

Vicki L. Baker, *Inside Higher Ed*, November 17, 2021

The University of Wyoming values our partnership and engagement with Wyoming communities in the creation and exchange of knowledge and resources.

Wyoming: Honoring our Heritage & Creating our Future – A
Strategic Plan for the University of Wyoming 2023+

What is Community Engagement?

Community engagement can be defined in many ways. For this purpose, we have operationally defined it as the reciprocal partnership with the community, involving mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge, the creation/co-creation, delivery and assessment of timely, unbiased educational materials and programs that address relevant, critical, and emerging issues. It should empower people in ways that result in desired outcomes, informed decisions, and/or improved quality of life.

What is “Community”?

The community that is served by an institution of higher education depends on the scope of the institution’s mission. As the land-grant institution and the only public university in the State of Wyoming, the community that the University of Wyoming serves is the entire state and its citizens, regardless of whether they reside on farms and ranches, small towns, or cities.

How is this different from Outreach, Professional Service, and Extension?

Community engagement and community outreach are two different concepts. Outreach is done *for* the community. It is typically one directional, with faculty applying their academic and professional expertise to address a community-identified need. This type of activity is typically captured in a faculty member’s job description as professional service. In contrast, engagement is a two-directional, reciprocal process done *with* the community. While engagement is not a stand-alone category in the faculty member’s job description, it can be reflected in the scholarship (research, creative contributions, and innovation/entrepreneurship) and teaching functions.

Extension provides educational development, leadership development, and collaborative activities to people throughout the state by bringing evidenced-based science and modern technologies to ranchers, farmers, consumers, families, and other residents of the state’s rural communities, cities, and towns.

Extension activities can overlap with community engagement when the university and community dually participate for the purpose of enriching a faculty member's scholarship *and* solving a community problem (i.e., community-engaged research), or of enhancing the curriculum, teaching, and learning at UW while *at the same time* giving residents the knowledge and skills needed to address a community problem (i.e., community-engaged teaching).

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND. The commitment to community in the land grant mission laid the foundation for enabling all citizens of the United States to participate in the nation's economic and social progress through focus on practical public education. This system of education was grounded on the assumption that knowledge provides a primary foundation for the creation of wealth, prosperity, and a stable democratic society. Inherent in UW's land grant mission, and within the mission as articulated by UW's Strategic Plans including, *Forward for Wyoming: Honoring our Heritage and Creating our Future*," as an institution we emphasize that we "engage with and serve the state of Wyoming" which extends UW's talent and capacity to "(s)ustain and enhance our extensive service to and engagement with the State to improve the mental, physical and economic health of Wyoming and its residents." Today, every division, college, school, and department of UW participates in numerous activities in the state, with significant impacts on communities in each of Wyoming's 23 counties and on the Wind River Indian Reservation.

Community engagement is an integral part of the UW mission and that of America's public universities. We see this emphasis across organizations such as the American Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities (APLU), which stresses the role of public universities in being actively engaged in their communities and regions, "tackling societal challenges, creating great places to work and live, and advancing economic growth and prosperity."¹ As a broad approach, adoption of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching definition of "community engagement" means an emphasis on "the partnership between university knowledge and resources" with those of the public and private sectors "to enrich scholarship, research, and creative activity; enhance curriculum, teaching and learning; prepare educated, engaged citizens; strengthen democratic values and civic responsibility; address critical societal issues; and contribute to the public good."²

This renewed emphasis on community engagement has defined a specific kind of relationship between higher education and society; one that acknowledges an interactive process where institutions and external partners exchange perspectives, materials, and resources to address the public good. Ernest Boyer, former president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, made the case that community engagement is an essential element of higher education and noted "...the scholarship of engagement means creating a special climate in which the academic and civic cultures communicate more continuously and more creatively with each other..."³ In the Kellogg Commission Report, *Returning to Our Roots: The Engaged Institution*, an engaged institution is defined as an institution responsive to the needs of today's and tomorrow's students, which enriches the student experience by bringing research into the curriculum and offering practical experience in the world they will enter. It forms

¹See Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities, Commission on Economic and Community Engagement, at <https://www.aplu.org/projects-and-initiatives/economic-development-and-community-engagement/>.

² See The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, "Elective Community Engagement Classification," (First-Time Classification Documentation Framework, 2020 Classification), Swearer Center, Brown University, p. 1 at <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ddFaZj2SP1bIh-NaamxzioEUjNtrHXt6/view>.

³Ernest Boyer (1996). "The Scholarship of Engagement." *Journal of Public Service and Outreach*, 1(1), 15-28, p. 27.

partnerships among faculty, students, and communities to put knowledge and skills to work to address today's most critical problems.⁴

Such synergistic definitions of engagement emphasize the ways faculty, staff, and students collaborate with external groups in mutually beneficial partnerships that are grounded in scholarship and consistent with its role and mission as a land-grant and comprehensive public university. The goals of community-engaged scholarship are the generation, exchange, and application of mutually beneficial and socially useful knowledge and practices developed through active partnerships between the academy and the community. At their best, these activities provide important learning and growth opportunities to faculty, students, staff, and partnering communities. Whether through research projects, teaching activities, civic engagement or service learning, the reciprocal nature of engagement enriches both excellence in our academic mission and the communities we serve.

This sentiment was an outgrowth of the conviction in the 1990s that U.S. colleges and universities had drifted away from their civic responsibilities and were no longer serving as a vehicle to address important national issues; instead, they were increasingly viewed as insular and ill prepared to address societal needs. From this crisis in public perceptions arose a dialogue on the civic roles of colleges and universities in forums such as the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities, work of the newly formed Campus Compact, the focus on community engagement within the APLU, and introduction of Carnegie's Classification of "community engaged institutions" in 2006 that define colleges and universities by their commitment to public engagement. National accrediting organizations now have begun to incorporate engagement into their criteria for accreditation.

EXAMPLES OF COMMUNITY-ENGAGED SCHOLARSHIP, TEACHING, AND SERVICE

Teaching. Partnering with the public or private sector reciprocally to co-develop and deliver community-based teaching and learning experiences oriented to community, industry, or organizational needs, such as service-learning experiences, on-site, professional internships, and collaborative programs, or developing and delivering off-campus teaching activities.

Scholarship – Research, Creative Contributions, Innovation and Entrepreneurship. Partnering with the public or private sector reciprocally to conduct and disseminate directed or contracted research; create exhibits in educational and cultural institutions; disseminate community-engaged research through public programs, events, refereed journals, and conference proceedings with community partners as co-authors; conduct and report program evaluation research or public policy analyses for other institutions and agencies; develop innovative solutions (e.g. inventions, patents, products, services, clinical procedures or practices) that address social or economic challenges; co-founding a startup with external partners.

Service. Partnering with the public or private sector reciprocally to provide technical assistance and/or services to them; co-host seminars and events for community, industry, or agency partners; write position papers for the general public; collaborate with schools, businesses,

⁴ Kellogg Commission (1999), *Returning to Our Roots: The Engaged Institution*, Kellogg Commission Report.

community groups, and civic agencies to develop policies; provide leadership in or make significant contributions to economic and community development activities.⁵

BENEFIT TO FACULTY MEMBERS. Faculty members who participate in engaged scholarship, teaching, and service activities can benefit in multiple ways. Engagement rooted in scholarship enhances teaching and learning; research, creative contributions, innovation, and entrepreneurship; and service while addressing larger societal issues.

From an academic career aspect, adding community engagement activities as valued components of academic performance has the potential to positively affect decisions regarding promotion and tenure when and where these activities are deemed relevant and appropriate. In consideration for reappointment, tenure and/or promotion, faculty members can list accomplishments such as providing a research-based solution to a community business, nonprofit, or governmental challenge; involving their students in application of their knowledge to solving a real-world challenge; and so forth.

From a professional development and intellectual aspect, engagement activities can provide stimulating and rewarding experiences that are not only enjoyable for faculty, but also provide real-world knowledge and “lessons learned” that the faculty member can translate into valuable classroom content. Such activities also contribute greatly toward keeping faculty members on the cutting edge of practical knowledge regarding topics such as industry practices, regulatory changes, and emerging technological innovations across industries and sectors.

BENEFIT TO STUDENTS. It is well-known that students respond in positive ways, and are more highly motivated, when they experience how real-world problems can be addressed using the knowledge they are mastering in the classroom. Community engagement and service-learning projects link campus teaching and learning to civic responsibility and community wellbeing.

BENEFIT TO THE INSTITUTION. Greater involvement of faculty and students in engagement activities can result in stronger, authentic connections to the people we serve across Wyoming. Tangible benefits resulting from engagement activities help citizens and elected officials see the importance of UW to the State of Wyoming.

BENEFIT TO THE STATE. As the only land-grant university in the state of Wyoming, UW’s mission includes service to the state across a broad spectrum of activities. For communities, partnering with Wyoming’s university increases their capacity to address important social, economic, and cultural issues.

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION. Effectively communicating the value of community outreach and engaged scholarship, teaching, and service at UW in existing performance structures of the university may be done in a variety of ways, depending on the discipline and college. Academic units and colleges are encouraged to review their policies and procedures that specify performance standards for their faculty and incorporate language about community engagement, where appropriate.

⁵ *University-Wide Evaluation Guidelines for Promotion and Tenure: The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Recommendations for Guidelines for Tenure and Promotion: Scholarly Activity that Enhances the Wisconsin Idea, and Colorado State University, Continuum of Engaged Scholarship – The How*

An example of university- and college-level engagement and outreach language suggested by the University of Wisconsin's "Wisconsin Idea," as applied across disciplines including Physical Sciences, Biological Sciences, Social Sciences, and Arts and Humanities Divisions is below.

***Community engaged scholarship** entails a partnership of University knowledge and resources with those of the public and private sectors to enrich scholarship and generate mutual benefits. It can include community-based research; teaching and experiential learning oriented to community needs; outreach and engagement to uplift communities, strengthen democratic values and civic responsibility; and any combination of these to enhance employment and sustainable community development, address critical societal issues, and contribute to the public good.⁶*

Academic units can also provide guidance to internal and external reviewers who make recommendations on a faculty member's reappointment, tenure, and/or promotion. Below are 10 examples of criteria that may be considered when reviewing community-engaged scholarship.

1. Discipline-specific expertise used to develop the community-engaged scholarship.
2. Scholarship is grounded in community needs and interests.
3. Community partners actively collaborate on the work.
4. Project is innovative and/or novel.
5. Academic and community goals are clearly addressed.
6. Appropriate scholarly methods and community engagement techniques used, and socially and ethically responsible conduct is evident.
7. Work is rigorous in its application of academic expertise.
8. Measurable outcomes in terms of impact and significance are evaluated from academic and community perspectives.
9. Translation of new knowledge is provided to the public through traditional disciplinary outlets (e.g., peer-reviewed journals, conference proceedings, etc.) and non-tradition venues (e.g., public policy, legislation, etc.)
10. Evidence of reflective critique on lessons learned to improve scholarship and community engagement is provided.

CONCLUSION. Incorporating recognition of engaged scholarship, teaching, and service activities by faculty members as components of academic performance, and thus as input to the Reappointment, Tenure, and Promotion process, could provide benefits to faculty members, to students, to the University of Wyoming, and to the state of Wyoming.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT. The Office of Academic Affairs would like to thank Jean Garrison and Anne Alexander for their leadership and input on this paper. A special thanks goes to the 2019-20 UW Engagement Council T&P Working Group (Jean Garrison, Kipp Coddington, Steve Smutko, Barbara Rasco, and Steve Farkas) for their assistance in developing the framework for policy and guidance on engagement and outreach in UW's reappointment, tenure, and promotion processes.

⁶ *Recommendations for Guidelines for Tenure and Promotion: Scholarly Activity that Enhances the Wisconsin Idea*