

Integrating Outreach With Research, Teaching and Service at the Department Level

To integrate outreach into its mission, the land-grant university must reengineer academic departments. Such fundamental change brings great challenges to the department itself, to the professional school, and to the role of teacher, especially when using distance education. Four participants at the forefront of such change described the challenges and opportunities brought about in such reengineering efforts.

Departmental Challenges: MSU's Master's Degree in Public Administration

Six years ago, Michigan State University decided to revitalize the longstanding MPA degree in the Department of Political Science. Challenges to accomplishing this revitalization included defining the market and finding the faculty. Brian Silver described this project as a kind of Rashomon story with at least two versions, both having elements of the truth. Central administration saw the move as filling the demands of state capitol officials and agency staff professionals, and felt that faculty's applied policy research would be seen as a valuable service to the state. The program would also respond to a longstanding complaint that MSU didn't care about public policy people. The department viewed the program as a former "raging success" whose faculty had been nationally known for their research. Retrenchment in the 1980s led to faculty shrinkage. Because the department became isolated and too concerned with professional standing, there were few linkages with other units, which viewed the department as uncooperative. By 1989 the administration decided the MPA program needed shoring up.

Along with the departmental revitalization, the university encouraged a focus on outreach as part of its land-grant mission. According to Silver, because the university did not begin with an established or widely discussed definition of outreach, some real uncertainty and several widely differing definitions of outreach prevail to this day. Silver felt the central administration misperceived the faculty as narrowly focused on traditional research although they had always done some applied research. Still, new language for promotion and tenure had to be written into faculty bylaws.

The focus on outreach also required a fundamental change in the department's sense of how it served the larger university mission. The main focus of the MPA program was applied research, not client services, which meant that it did not appear to be doing as much outreach as other units. The department counted on the Institute for Public Policy and Social Research to link policy analysis to research.

Faculty were concerned about the shift from a more narrow disciplinary view to interdisciplinary applied research with a broad view. As a result, all junior faculty must now prepare a career plan explaining their subfield of research. This has worked quite well. Because of the expansion in the

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scope of research and the number of faculty involved, the department decided to engage a broader range of faculty beyond the five or six new, young and unproven faculty hired for the MPA program.

The program cannot yet be termed a success, but it is nationally recognized and growing, has earned accreditation more quickly than the original five-year goal, and is engaging a more diverse faculty group in applied research in such areas as K-12 educational finance, schools of choice, state health policy reform and violence against women. Silver described the MPA program as “primarily a work in progress. We will know a lot more in five years, and ten years. It takes a long time to establish a nationally prominent program.”

The Vantage Point of the Professional School: MSU’s School of Social Work

During the budget retrenchment of the 1980s, MSU’s School of Social Work had lost coherence and sense of mission. In the past few years, outreach has played a fundamental role in shaping the academic mission of the unit. “I subscribe to the grappling hook theory, that if you throw out tentacles far enough and they are imbedded deeply enough, you will learn how to survive,” said Marilyn Flynn. Because it is the mission of the entire faculty to focus on outreach and because serving the client population is imperative for the school, the School of Social Work now has a “culture of consistency.”

When Flynn arrived at MSU, she found the atmosphere — where boundaries were unusually low between disciplines — invigorating for outreach. This atmosphere led to one of the most distinctive features of the program: it is the only social work program in the United States that links three campuses in a two-way-interactive complete degree program. This very distinctiveness was a problem for the national accrediting body which fought against it “tooth and nail. It was incomprehensible to them that this program could have the same quality — in support, faculty or students — as a campus program.”

Because outreach is a unit mission, every member of the faculty teaches in the distance education program and every faculty member is committed to writing and publishing in this area. A consciously reinvented research component is carried out in three ways: 1) by analyzing the instructional process and classroom dynamics as affected by these linkages; 2) through exploring the effects on the infrastructure in the communities where programs are offered; and 3) by creating new networks within the university for the department.

An enormous investment of resources and activities also goes to support and socialize students. The involvement of the student body is critical in this outreach-based program. Unexpectedly, off-campus students initially

feel like stepchildren in the experiment. Other challenges facing the program include financial risk. The program has a \$600,000 budget for four years and is deliberately being run on a self-supporting basis. Flynn feels that in the long term some form of risk-sharing between individual units and the central administration needs to be developed. If units take this sort of risk and happen to succeed, there should also be some well defined institutional reward or assurance. With the present budget pressures, if an outreach program should show a surplus, central administration might find it hard to resist recouping all surplus funds. Flynn says, "One of my largest concerns is not that we will fail, but that we will succeed and that there will be nothing in it."

Because of its "virtual campus" nature, this program needs legitimacy — institutional support to assure that accrediting bodies change their standards if individual professions change to become the vanguards of campuses. The research agenda cannot be allowed to lapse. Finally, university administration has to restructure accounting methods to support entrepreneurial initiatives.

The Role of Teacher in Distance Education

How has teaching through distance education affected the role of a faculty member? How has distance education affected the way a faculty member carries out work? Ellen Whipple believes faculty who have used distance learning have a sense of shared experience. For her, it was a "stressful event" with more work than traditional delivery, requiring planning class presentations "minute by minute," which has paid out some mixed rewards.

To Whipple as teacher, the experience made the world seem bigger and smaller at the same time. She felt a stronger sense of the entire state as campus but struggled with less time to work on publication. Whipple was "used to closing the door and teaching. Now I have producers and directors." While she was very nervous at first, the experience later became very reaffirming. Distance technology gave her the opportunity to observe others teach as well. She has found it to be a reciprocal learning experience for her and her students, many of whom are experienced professionals who have clinical experience or are heads of agencies.

As an untenured assistant professor, spending this much time just before review has been anxiety-producing. Whipple came with a strong publish or perish perspective. Her involvement in many research projects in the community has given her an opportunity to write in another area and opened up evaluative service in teaching and outreach. Additionally, with seventy-five students doing weekly evaluations and an opportunity to view instruction on videotape, new opportunities for evaluation emerge, including the potential for research on how to evaluate teaching. But will

the university administration reward with tenure the exchange of publication for teaching? Or should an untenured professor take the traditional teacher-scholar route?

Reengineering Extension and Outreach: Conclusion

The president of Auburn University truly understands the land-grant mission and fully intends to elevate outreach so it parallels teaching and research. As part of the effort, David Wilson established twelve associate deans for outreach across the university. While faculty embrace the land-grant mission, a major impediment to change is that they are traditionally trained in their craft to publish in the best journals or to publish books through the best publishers. How do you reengineer the faculty role so they are out on the front lines? As the associate provost and vice president for university outreach, Wilson chairs a universitywide committee to usher in the process and tear down impediments. Reengineering an academic department to emphasize outreach is quite challenging.

Wilson concluded the session by reviewing the models presented in this program for what could be learned. The MPA model led to departmental change, but it is not clear what made it different from the traditional program. Did students receive different educational coursework? Auburn University itself found those small towns that needed MPA graduates and then established 12 fellowships which funded half the cost for the first year.

The model established at the MSU School of Social Work was innovative, especially in its three-campus connection; however, it has a big job in educating the MSU administration “that collaboration is a perfect example of extending the university to communities that are underserved.”

Currently distance technology is underutilized. Land-grant universities must use all of their resources. “We haven’t even scratched the surface as to how we can use distance education.” Nor have we begun to bring the issue of measuring quality teaching to the fore.