

Integrating Outreach into the Careers of Faculty

Ann Austin, MSU associate professor of higher, adult and lifelong education, set the context for the panel discussion by listing three contextual factors influencing faculty in integrating outreach into their careers and by posing three questions to guide the discussion.

Contextual Factors

1. Socialization of faculty members. If we truly wish to integrate outreach into faculty careers, we must be concerned with socialization practices for graduate students. Currently, faculty do a fine job of integrating graduate students into their research agendas and, indeed, this is the way graduate students become immersed in the norms and values of their respective disciplines. When they move into the professoriate, they are introduced to their teaching mission, but seldom is outreach introduced in a way that integrates it across the years of their careers.

2. Not all faculty members are the same. Individuals at different career stages face different challenges. The pre-tenure stage holds serious challenges for young faculty members as they receive multiple and mixed messages about what the institution values, and what is valued by the department and by peers in their field.

3. Disciplines have diverse norms and values. The faculty is not a large, homogeneous group. Within each discipline, the way work is done differs and the way people work together differs. Expectations vary, outputs vary.

Three Questions

1. What can and does “integration” mean to faculty?
2. What are the different strategies and patterns of integrating outreach into their careers?
3. From the faculty point of view, what can the institution do to help the faculty integrate outreach into their careers?

Melissa Crimp, MSU assistant professor, College of Engineering, addressed the integration of outreach into her faculty career. Though she was hired for her specific research abilities, she expected also to teach. The area of service or outreach, however, was “fuzzy.” Participating in the Lilly Teaching Program helped her bring service, research, and teaching together. She started doing lectures at the residency programs of medical schools, lecturing on implant materials to third- and fourth-year orthopedic residents. These lectures resulted in networks that evolved into a research project in regeneration of cartilage. A new research domain has been established and she now works closely with clinical surgeons to explore the medical applications of materials technology.

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There are conflicts among teaching, research, and outreach. She is careful in selecting outreach projects and considers the following: time, funding, and scientific value. For example, she may not have the time. Or she may be interested but there's no monetary incentive to her to give up her time. She may be offered funding and she may have the time, but if the outreach opportunity doesn't offer sufficient scientific research value, she will turn it down. For Crimp, achieving balance comes down to a simple guideline: As long as outreach activities have relevance for her field and her research, then it is time well spent.

John Beck, assistant professor of labor and industrial relations, was originally hired to do only outreach and then took on other professorial responsibilities. The School of Labor and Industrial Relations (LIR) began as an institute that did research and outreach, and then added graduate level teaching in the mid-1960s. Its mission now includes teaching, research, and working with three constituencies: labor, management professionals within the human relations field, and jointly-managed cooperative programs (e.g., Ford Motor). One of LIR's goals is to get the different parts of the faculty mission to mutually reinforce one other. Faculty who involve themselves in industry quickly learn that they can bring back what happens there into the classroom. Outreach sites become laboratories which students use as their classrooms. Because of these outreach activities, faculty are publishing articles that will help expand the field of practice.

To accomplish integration of outreach, it was necessary for LIR to change the notion of what constitutes tenure. Beck is a tenure stream assistant professor with an M.A. but no Ph.D. He is expected to meet the criteria for tenure, however. The school has had to be flexible and reconfigure the importance of publishing research and adding knowledge to the field. Reaching a balance of quality and diversity in understanding multiple missions has been necessary.

Quality and quantity of outreach is also important if LIR is to escape becoming just another consulting firm. Much outreach comes out of collaboration with faculty in different departments and within LIR. Maintaining a critical tension is important — engaging intellectually, looking at things in a new way and always trying to see how to push to the next level.

Laurie Wink, program director for continuing education and public service at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, reported on a study in which she examined three exemplar senior faculty types and how they integrate outreach into their careers. The majority of the forty-one male and female senior faculty members interviewed saw the three dimensions of teaching, research, and outreach as interrelated and used the following words to describe the interrelationship: blended, mutually

supportive, overlapping, complementary, synergistic. Although they felt limited by time constraints, they viewed the interrelationship as a challenge, not a burden. They further considered “service” as not well defined, evaluated, or rewarded.

Three major multidimensional types of faculty emerged:

1. Researchers see their fundamental purpose as generating knowledge to benefit society. Research dollars support their teaching and public service activities. Research is centered in real-world needs and is aligned in their minds with public service. They value academic freedom and flexibility. Tenured senior professors in this category have the best sense of public service and how to integrate it with the rest of their career. They consider as an exemplary faculty member one who is recognized nationally and internationally for creating knowledge, who contributes to society, and who also performs well in other dimensions of the faculty role.

2. Teacher-scholars are intellectually curious and equally interested in students’ intellectual growth and professional development. They transmit their passion to students and consider teaching a form of public service. Their fundamental purpose is to educate students who will make the world a better place, and their primary motivations are to transmit their intellectual passion to students and to leave a legacy as productive scholars. They willingly participate in recruiting, mentoring, and advising. Teacher-scholars plan their professional activities around teaching and are unsuccessful at putting time aside for scholarly writing. They view public service activities as sources of real-world experience to enrich their instruction. For them, an exemplary faculty member is one who is good enough to solve problems and make a scholarly contribution and, at the same time, work well with others and share what he or she knows. Research is as much about teaching new researchers as it is about discovering new knowledge.

3. Integrators find their purpose in the use of knowledge to benefit society. Their own standards and the needs of others are the basis for decision making. They view outreach as real-world experience used to give them professional credibility. For them, a three-way appointment is not segregated but is an integrated whole. They view an exemplary faculty member as one who contributes to the good of the order — students, academic units, university, state taxpayers, clients, or society as a whole. Their work has impact and is useful and has helped make a difference by assisting people in identifying and addressing problems. They view themselves as “in synch” with the university’s mission but see themselves as atypical.

Steve Weiland, MSU professor of higher, adult and lifelong education, declared himself suspicious of the emerging outreach approach. He asked that administrators do three things concerning outreach.

1. Rethink the metaphor. Integration, he says, is the wrong metaphor and faculty can rightfully be suspicious that the way “integration” is being used may have normative implications. Faculty fear that what is meant is not “combine into a whole” but rather “complete or perfect by the addition of the necessary parts.” To imply that the academic profession needs to be completed may be viewed as arrogant and makes faculty uneasy. The word “addition” gets the job done. “Adding” outreach activities is enough. Coming up with a new model of the academic vocation is not the job of faculty.

2. Work the halls. Administrators need to work the halls — “schlepping.” You can’t enlist the faculty without knowing what they’re doing. You need to know what they love to do and want to do and understand them from their perspective. Pay attention to demography. At MSU, eighty-five percent of the faculty are tenured. The incentive system is not what we think it is, and we are spending far too much time “fussing over the reward system.” We need to quit “beating the faculty over the head with the land-grant or service stick” and trying to mobilize them to do things they wouldn’t ordinarily do.

In the opening program of the conference, participants heard a quotation to the effect:

“The learners will be ready for the world ahead; the learned will be left with a world that no longer exists.” This is a disastrous attitude to take to the faculty to promote outreach. Instead, reverse these terms and give enormous attention and respect to the learned. Embrace specialization.

3. Become critics of our own work. We need to “teach the conflicts” and bring forth the disagreements of the faculty. Don’t look at the land-grant tradition uncritically. Problematize it. Investigate the historical problems it represents and invite the faculty to participate.

Weiland closed with an analogy to Ralph’s Grocery in Lake Woebegone. Its motto is, “If we don’t have it, you can get along without it.” In other words, our opportunities may not match our desires. A perspective of this kind, mixed into the constitutional idealism of outreach, might have the paradoxical effect of making it more effective.