

Leadership Roles and Responsibilities

A 1995 national survey conducted by the Social and Economic Sciences Research Center at Washington State University (Dillman, Christenson, Salant and Warner, Technical Report #95-52) documented what the public wants from higher education. According to the report, lifelong learning is a reality for most Americans, and a majority expect to take a credit course in the next three years; seventy-five percent expect to take a noncredit course. Instruction received via the traditional campus classroom will not meet the public's demand for tailored educational services. The public is also demanding more information and knowledge utilization. The report states that "A majority of adults think it's important for land-grant universities to provide multiple services, including undergraduate and graduate teaching; teaching older, returning students; providing off-campus technical help; and conducting research."

A Central Approach

James Ryan of Pennsylvania State University believes that new opportunities now exist for developing educational partnerships that will be helpful to communities, provide strengthened learning experiences and internships for students, and result in increased favorable visibility for universities. Due to increased usage of distance technology, programming today is conducted in a national or even international environment.

Succeeding in this new environment will not be easy. More informed customers are critical in new ways. They are demanding quality programs, at reasonable cost, conveniently located, with single-point/easy access and customized to meet their particular needs. An increasing number of public and private learning providers are offering educational services in innovative and timely formats responsive to customer needs—not on university time. University libraries are also outreach providers.

University programs will be successful if they are effective and efficient, have high impact, mean something, and are financially viable. Outreach is a stool with three legs: extension, which has a traditional role at land-grant institutions; continuing and distance education; and research and technology transfer-commercialization of intellectual properties and new product development.

In a centralized continuing education structure such as the one at Pennsylvania State University, a sizable cadre of academic support personnel are available to assist faculty. These staff members conduct market research to determine the need for potential academic programs, assist faculty members in program design and delivery methods appropriate for their customers, plan and implement promotional strategies to attract customers, and evaluate programs to decide subsequent actions to be taken.

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Having centralized support services facilitates economy of scale. They eliminate duplicative services and increase the breadth and quality of the support services provided. Having a highly developed professional infrastructure in place may make the system more agile and responsive to emerging customer needs/demands.

A Decentralized Approach

James Votruba of Michigan State University described the decentralized system of outreach operating at Michigan State University. Over the past ten years, the university has sought to shift responsibility for outreach to colleges and departments and integrate it into the mission of the total university. While this move was a “bold and risky step,” according to the vice provost, he believes that it sweeps in a larger group of faculty because of the broadened array of activities now viewed as outreach-credit and noncredit instruction, technical assistance, applied research, and policy analysis.

Ownership for outreach now resides in the units. Previously, students enrolled off campus or in evening or extended-day programs facilitated by an outreach administrative unit were perceived as belonging to the outreach unit. Now students, whether enrolled on campus or at distant locations, are viewed by the deans and chairs of the units as “our” students and not “your” students. Thanks to a W. K. Kellogg Foundation grant, a sizable investment in technology by MSU has enabled the university to offer degree programs throughout the state, in locations convenient to the customers.

Departmental and college administrators have an important role in making the shift to a more integrated and decentralized approach to outreach. A special staff development program (MULTI) is being offered annually to ten department chairs to help them understand how to implement and maintain excellence across the breadth of mission.

Votruba identified important challenges that universities must address if they intend to more fully integrate outreach as a central academic mission, particularly at the department level. These “catalysts for realignment” are described in the matrix on pages 44-46.

Advantages of the decentralized model are: the creation of ownership for outreach more broadly within the university community, the possibility for realigning the university to better serve society, the enhancement of teaching and research; and the increased agility of departments in shifting resources to meet changing needs.

Focus on Function, Let Form Follow

Participants in the session raised questions concerning how best to report outreach accomplishments. Panelists suggested that it was important to tell the stories anecdotally and point out the value added by outreach initiatives. However, it is also important to define outreach performance indicators that can be used to measure quality and productivity across units. There was agreement that “We must communicate our effectiveness.”

Programs must be evaluated as to their impact and should regularly report to such bodies as university regents or trustees. However, developing an impact database without a good set of indicators is difficult. Such indicators are not readily available at this time. One member of the audience noted that “Strong undergraduate programs and impacts from outreach help protect research, which the public doesn’t understand.”

Many problems that outreach initiatives address demand interdisciplinary efforts and often call for temporary groupings of departments or units, which may be difficult to “orchestrate,” given the nature of promotion and tenure systems and departmental loyalties. On the other hand, centers and institutes may provide a mechanism to undertake interdisciplinary outreach work. Although there may be difficulty in funding specialized efforts, funding a cluster of high-performing faculty on a nonrecurring basis may have merit when the demand calls for a specialized temporary grouping. Panelists agreed that “the public doesn’t care how we are organized.” They simply want quality, accessibility, affordability, and responsiveness to their informational and problem-solving needs.

A Matrix for University Realignment

UNIVERSITY STRUCTURES AND CULTURES:					
	University	Extension/Cont. Education	Colleges	Departments or Academic Units	Faculty & Staff
CATALYSTS FOR REALIGNMENT:					
Mission/Vision					
Leadership Development					
Constituent Ownership & Advocacy					
Institutional Policies & Procedures					
Planning & Evaluation					
Faculty Socialization & Development					
Incentives & Rewards					
Human Resources					
Financial, Physical, & Technological Resources					
Organizational Restructuring					

Mission/Vision

At the university, college, and department levels, a vision and related missions, which include outreach, must be articulated, clarified, and aligned. The vision must take into account the history and heritage of an institution and how historical context provides the base from which change occurs.

Leadership Development

Senior administrators, deans, department chairpersons, directors, and faculty leaders must develop and utilize effective strategies for helping their faculty understand the outreach mission, and for encouraging faculty to incorporate the outreach mission into the subsystem of the institution. Institutions need to develop approaches to hiring, reappointment, and evaluation of leaders that incorporate attention to the outreach mission”

Constituent Ownership and Advocacy

Universities must have both advocacy and support from such external partners as K-12 schools, state government, business and industry, arts groups, senior citizens, professional associations, communities, and others who have a stake in and may help shape the outreach mission as well as advocating on its behalf. Historically, these relationships have existed between land-grant universities and agriculture. A vital and energetic outreach mission requires constituent ownership and advocacy from other sectors as well.

Institutional Policies and Procedures

Making outreach a thoroughly integrated part of the academic mission requires a comprehensive review of institutional policies and procedures to assess the extent to which they either inhibit or enhance outreach involvement at the campus, college, departmental, or faculty level.

Planning and Evaluation

An outreach planning and evaluation process must be consistently applied across the multiple domains of the institution. This process should involve assessment and accountability and should be integrated into overall strategic planning, a plan that sets outreach priorities and directs resources to efforts that can be most effective.

Faculty Socialization and Development

Strategies must be implemented to enhance the understanding of and commitment to the outreach mission among current as well as prospective and aspiring faculty (i.e., graduate students). Recognizing and supporting faculty diversity, including intellectual diversity as well as social and demographic diversity, universities must assist faculty members in learning how to carry out effective outreach efforts themselves and to involve undergraduate and graduate students, just as they are assisted and encouraged to conduct research or engage in effective teaching.

Incentives and Rewards

Providing incentives and rewards that encourage and sustain outreach efforts across all domains of the university requires thoughtful and skillful implementation. Apart from reward systems for research, there is a need for greater knowledge of and experimentation with new forms of rewards and incentives at both the individual and unit levels.

Human Resources

A vital and energetic outreach mission must have sufficient human resources to support the effort. These will include outreach administrators such as those found in continuing education and extension units, field staff who work to connect the resources of the university with local community needs, and support professionals who assist in such things as market analysis, instructional design, and evaluation related to outreach programming. Human resources may also include faculty and staff who support outreach at the college or departmental levels.

Financial, Physical, and Technological Resources

In addition to human resources, the outreach mission requires financial support if it is to be, in fact, a primary university mission. Questions still remain concerning where the outreach investments are best made and what combination of recurring, nonrecurring, state, foundation, and self-generated revenue is feasible, given the resource constraints that confront all of higher education.

Resources are also needed to expand technological capacity; for example, investment in distance education technology to extend access to education and expert knowledge to people in remote locations. Distance education technology, while still very costly, is causing universities to rethink some fundamental questions related to who they serve and where and how they serve them.

Organizational Restructuring

Organizational structures must be configured in ways that integrate outreach and extension/continuing education into the work of the university, colleges, and departments. New structures may be required to stimulate interdisciplinary work as well as the integration of research and applications in community settings.