

Developing and Enhancing Outreach Leadership Among Executive Administrators and Deans

Outreach has often been seen as being on the periphery of the university. For it to permeate the institution, executive administrators have to provide and share leadership for outreach, and design systems and programs to develop that leadership at every level of the university. A panel of administrators, led by Roy Arnold as moderator, came to general agreement that there were no or few programs and workshops designed specifically to develop leadership for outreach. Discussion then focused on two main themes: 1) how the university could develop leadership for outreach in-house; 2) how leadership for outreach could be manifested through structural and practical design.

There is no reason to design a program specifically for outreach leadership, according to C. Eugene Allen of the University of Minnesota. Many good generic programs for leadership development already exist: The Center for Creative Leadership, Outward Bound, and the Kellogg program are examples. Lyla Houglum of Oregon State University held up the National Extension Leadership Development program (NELD) developed by Jerold Apps as an example of developing “next-stage leadership.” It remains one of the few programs that truly explores building shared leadership and shared vision and incorporates people who have not been previously involved in extension.

Allen maintained that “None of us is doing an effective job at leadership development.” Especially critical is the development of new faculty department chairs, who hold one of the more difficult roles and are often new to administrative duties when first appointed. Frank Fear, Michigan State University, described three institutional initiatives which are key:

- Make appropriate employment decisions by changing the hiring process. “We get what we ask for or what we don’t ask for,” he said. Look for people who have a sense of the connectedness across university functions and who walk the talk.
- Create an outreach council to frame the institutional agenda. The council becomes a real-time opportunity for potential or new leaders to participate, and may be a reflective and transformative experience – a leadership laboratory.
- Focus the institutional planning process on outreach as a visible expression of leadership. When you expect action plans that serve the outreach portion of the university mission, you get results.

Developing leadership for outreach is difficult at least in part because the importance and value of outreach are still in question. Many unit administrators remain to be convinced. If the agenda of the dean or administrator is first understood and outreach positioned accordingly, then outreach can become a vehicle to meet departmental objectives instead of being seen as extraneous. Only when outreach is shown to have quality and impact will it become more central to the individual departments. Improved quality measures can prove this effectiveness.

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Advisory committees can “make the case” for outreach when significant stakeholders serve on these committees.

Lamartine Hood of Pennsylvania State University described five principles for providing effective leadership for outreach:

- Commitment from the top. Penn State’s new president makes frequent statements about outreach, articulates its different components, and travels around the state speaking to hundreds of PSU extension campuses. Donald Swoboda from the University of Arizona agreed that the outreach agenda has to be raised higher in the university through the philosophical commitment of leaders and by becoming central within the culture of the institution. Key to this is the commitment and behavior of the CEO and the executive team. The clear and regular articulation of the institutional vision of outreach maintains the expectation.
- The president must try to break down the divisions and barriers between outreach and the rest of the university. Swoboda described how the leadership and involvement of the academic deans as partners in outreach leadership can serve to permeate the vision throughout the colleges. Deans should be involved in planning for outreach and in meetings with external constituencies. Furthermore, many of the activities in which schools and faculty are presently involved in are, in reality, outreach activities and should be seen as such. Attempting to force them into the formal outreach department could destroy them, but the institution must support them so their frequency and effectiveness grow.
- When selecting leaders, look for change agents — champions of systemic, sustainable, lasting change. To avoid merely “cloning” current leaders, introduce new leaders to different ideas instead of growing them in the context of the current institution.
- Develop shared vision and shared ownership of outreach throughout the university.
- In order for faculty to see outreach as having value, begin when you hire new faculty. Speak of the importance of outreach, write it into job descriptions, hire those who are committed to outreach or are at least comfortable with it.

Hood suggested the creation of an Outreach Council to help formalize and institutionalize outreach. Other actions included coming to a clear definition of outreach at your institution, publishing it, communicating periodically with trustees so they can understand it, and providing regular reports to the faculty senate, the council of deans and so forth. High visibility and high expectations lead outreach to a more central place in the university.

Houglum described three structural changes which have served to institutionalize leadership for outreach at Oregon State:

■ An Extended Education (Outreach) Council of academic deans which developed a shared definition of outreach and its meaning at OSU, and developed plans for implementing the definition.

■ An Extended Education Coordinating Committee composed of one representative from each college (someone who can speak for that college), the administrative leadership of outreach, and other key representatives from the university and from county extension centers to coordinate the day-to-day activities for outreach.

■ The integration of extension faculty into the colleges and departments with full faculty status and tenure. Furthermore, OSU has revised the tenure and rewards system to include outreach. This was a “scary process” for outreach and other faculty, but it has resulted in “exchanges” where extension faculty come to the classroom in return for classroom faculty going out into the community. Program leadership resides in the academic units.

Some schools are more receptive initially to outreach, according to Swoboda. Veterinary science, education, and agriculture are among the first to adopt outreach. To reach others, it is important to say and to show that elevating outreach does not diminish the position or importance of teaching or research. The demonstration of clear benefits of outreach, such as increased public confidence in the university, increased opportunities for recruitment of students, and increased service to alumni, all can serve to further the acceptance of outreach. Conversations about program quality, delivery systems, and tenure issues will help to further the cultural change required for outreach to move closer to the center of the institution.

Questions from the audience addressed some hurdles that are likely to appear. Fears among farmers and the agriculture college that they will lose money when extension widens in definition have to be addressed by demonstrating that another academic unit may receive part of that funding only when it is in a better position to address a particular issue, and that the expenditure would be appropriate to the need addressed.

Conflicts remain nonetheless among external clients and within the staff of Cooperative Extension about whether extension should remain primarily agricultural. The consensus of the panel was that extension must broaden and deepen throughout the university or its health will be threatened. Clients at community-based extension centers have issues that go far beyond what the traditional cooperative extension service can address. A public university, in its commitment to the public, must serve needs at the local level. The extension system is a good one. The university must capitalize on it and broaden its focus to serve more people in more ways.

Do you then bring people in from outside traditional extension to transform leadership for outreach? The panel believed that recruitment of new people from without and the growth of leaders from within are both necessary, as long as current leadership does not clone itself.

Diversity of viewpoints is necessary in getting people to the agenda of leadership for transforming outreach. Change must occur quickly in the middle of the organization where very little change is now occurring. Yet, if forced, damage could occur. Arnold noted that in a recent orientation of new faculty hired at Oregon State, fewer than half came from public higher education and only one fourth had a land-grant background. The challenge will be to take this diversity and use it advantageously, orienting and educating faculty to the new vision of outreach within the mission of the land-grant university.