
Prologue

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Throughout its history, a defining characteristic of the American university has been its capacity and willingness to help advance the economic, social, and civic vitality of our nation. Over the past 100 years, America's universities have brought science to agriculture, educated the workforce for industrial expansion, provided educational access that contributed to civic literacy and social mobility, and generated research and technology that has been instrumental in advancing every sector of American life.

This covenant between the university and society has resulted in enormous benefit for both. Recognizing that an investment in its universities was an investment in its own future, our nation has provided the support necessary to build what, by nearly any standard, is the finest system of higher education in the world.

Today, the advanced learning needs of society are undergoing a fundamental transformation and universities are challenged to adapt. In what many describe as the Knowledge Age, learning across the lifespan has become a necessity for nearly everyone. This emphasis on lifelong learning, combined with the emergence of sophisticated new educational technologies, is pressing universities to address important questions related to access. Access for whom? Access to what? Access how? Access where?

In addition to an emphasis on lifelong learning, society is confronting an array of complex and formidable challenges that will shape the future of our nation and its people. Among the most important are economic competitiveness in an increasingly interdependent world economy, improving the quality of K-12 education, overcoming the tragic human and economic costs associated with urban and rural poverty, enhancing environmental quality and sustainability, and improving the quality of life through health promotion and disease prevention. If universities hope to sustain public support, they must effectively address these challenges through the extension and application of their scholarly expertise.

Nearly a decade ago, Michigan State University made a commitment to broaden, strengthen, and more fully integrate the extension and application of knowledge, or what we now refer to as outreach, as a primary mission of each major academic unit. In 1988, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation awarded the university a \$10.2 million grant to help support this institutionwide realignment process. Over the past several years, a number of other universities have embarked on similar efforts to make outreach a more central and integrated element in their overall academic mission. As they have moved beyond the rhetoric of change to the implementation of complex and often contentious institutional realignment strategies, they have looked for opportunities to learn from one other.

In October, 1995, Michigan State celebrated the completion of its Kellogg Foundation grant with a capstone symposium designed to focus on institutional strategies to strengthen and more fully integrate outreach as a fundamental element of the university's overall academic mission. The intent was to share what MSU had learned from its own efforts as well as to learn from similar efforts at other universities.

The capstone symposium was attended by leadership teams from over sixty major universities. The teams were comprised of presidents and provosts, deans and chairs, leaders of extension and continuing education, and faculty leaders from a broad array of disciplines and professional fields.

In his welcoming remarks to the conferees, MSU president Peter McPherson emphasized that universities have not kept pace with shifts in the educational marketplace. The public's demand for lifelong learning has created a whole new postsecondary market that places a greater emphasis on what people know than on what credentials they possess. This is a highly competitive and learner-centered market that emphasizes access to knowledge when, where, and in the form that it is needed. It is a market that is producing a whole new array of educational providers, both profit and nonprofit, who are challenging the university's role in providing advanced learning.

In his symposium opening remarks, Dr. Russell Mawby, Kellogg Foundation chairman emeritus, echoed these sentiments and challenged the university to strengthen its capacity to synthesize knowledge around the critical issues of the day; to rebalance the incentive and reward system to better acknowledge the importance of knowledge transmission and application as well as knowledge discovery; to build new and mutually beneficial partnerships with local communities; and to contribute to the forging of a new civic culture that builds upon and celebrates differences among people. In what may be his most important challenge to universities, Dr. Mawby called upon academic leaders to exercise clarity of vision, confidence, courage, compassion, venturesomeness, a willingness to take risks, and the boldness required to lead universities during these uncertain times.

Much of the capstone symposium was focused on better understanding the "MSU Outreach Model." In 1993, the Provost's Committee on University Outreach, comprised of faculty and academic administrators from throughout the campus, asserted that "universities exist to generate, transmit, apply, and preserve knowledge. When they do these things for the direct benefit of external audiences, they are doing outreach." Based on this formulation, the MSU outreach model has four defining characteristics.

First, outreach is defined as scholarship which must be reflective, cumulative, based on current knowledge, and resulting in new insights and understandings that are subject to critical review. In other words, outreach both draws on knowledge developed through other forms of scholarship and contributes to the knowledge base.

Second, outreach cuts across and enhances both the teaching and research missions of the university. In this formulation, outreach can take a variety of forms including applied research, technical assistance, demonstration projects, impact evaluations, student service-learning, policy analysis, and off-campus credit and noncredit instruction.

Third, outreach is conducted for the direct benefit of external constituents in ways consistent with the mission of the university. Outreach must be assessed in terms of both its impact on the external constituent and on the extent to which it enhances the university's other mission dimensions.

Fourth, outreach is the responsibility of each academic unit in the same way that the units are responsible for serving the other dimensions of the university's academic mission. In MSU's approach to outreach, academic units are evaluated based on their contribution to the full breadth of the research, teaching, and outreach mission.

The MSU outreach model requires that the university internally realign itself in several important ways. For example, the University has had to address the creation of both faculty and unit-level incentives and rewards that reinforce the importance of outreach involvement. It has had to create new organizational structures that support interdisciplinary approaches to complex societal problems. It has had to reformulate its planning and budgeting process to ensure that outreach is represented as a core academic mission. It has had to change a broad range of institutional policies and procedures that inhibited outreach involvement. Selection and evaluation of deans, chairs, and other academic leaders has had to be broadened to include an assessment of capacity and performance related to outreach leadership. New approaches to faculty and graduate student development now emphasize the enhancement of professional skills related to outreach scholarship. In short, the MSU outreach model has prompted the campus to engage in an in-depth look at how it goes about accomplishing its work.

The major advantages of the MSU outreach model derive from making outreach a more fully integrated component of each academic unit's mission rather than the responsibility of a separate administrative unit. The model has encouraged ownership of the outreach mission by each academic unit. It has forced the institution to realign itself both internally and externally to better serve the advanced learning needs of society. It has emphasized the inextricable link between outreach and the other mission dimensions. Finally, it has prompted the development of

greater agility, responsiveness, and student centeredness throughout the institution, which we believe will characterize the twenty-first century university.

The MSU outreach model also can have some disadvantages, at least in the short run. If adequate systems are not in place at the unit level, eliminating a separate administrative infrastructure for outreach can reduce the capacity of the campus to respond quickly and effectively to societal learning needs as they emerge. Serving the new lifelong education market requires sophisticated approaches to market assessment, program development, instructional design, and marketing. Historically, these skills have often been present in highly professional continuing education units. In the MSU model, these same skills must be found in colleges, departments, centers, and institutes. The model can also make it more difficult to mount interdisciplinary outreach initiatives until the campus achieves what Oregon State University calls a “low walls” academic environment that encourages and rewards work across disciplines and professional fields.

What follows is a summary of each of the capstone presentations along with the names and addresses of persons who can be contacted for further information. The reader should be aware that the programs and strategies described in this summary represent “works in progress.” They reflect the willingness of a few universities to accept Dr. Mawby’s challenge to be bold, venturesome, and courageous. They represent not generalized rhetoric nor marginalized institutional tinkering, but rather an attempt to fundamentally realign universities to better serve the society that created and sustains them — to better fulfill their social covenant.
