Tools of Engagement

Online Learning Modules

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Welcome to the Tools of Engagement Web site!

"... [community engagement] has provided me a way to really understand the issues that I learn about in class and has also helped me find a way to be a part of making a stronger community."

Emily Cunningham
MSU Student

This Web site has modules for undergraduate students interested in learning how to work collaboratively with community partners.

- Learn more about the curriculum

If you are visiting this Web site for the first time, please look at the Getting Started page.

- To access the learning modules, please log in.
The Tools of Engagement (ToE) are a series of non-discipline-specific modules designed to:

- Introduce undergraduate students to the concept of university-community engagement
- Develop their community-based research and engagement skills
- Support the work of faculty in introducing and integrating concepts of engagement into curricula
- Assist with training the next generation of engaged scholars
Tools of Engagement

There are 5 modules in total, focusing on such issues as effectively working in groups, successful partnerships, negotiation techniques, and so on.

- Module 1: The Engaged Scholar: MSU's Land-Grant Mission
- Module 2: Community-Based Engagement: Power and Privilege
- Module 3: Collaborative Negotiation
- Module 4: Principles of Engagement: How to Make Groups Work
- Module 5: Capacity Building
Tools of Engagement

- The modules encourage students to critically reflect on the content.
- The modules provide students with concrete examples that illustrate abstract concepts and ask students to come up with their own real-life instances.
- These modules can be taken in consecutive or random order.
- Instructors can choose to integrate the modules into their coursework by presenting the material to the students during class or they can assign students to complete the modules prior to class.
Module 1: The Engaged Scholar: MSU's Land-Grant Mission

Learning Objectives

After completing this module you will understand:

- What it means for MSU to be an engaged institution with a land-grant history
- The responsibility that the land-grant mission places on faculty and students to engage with community partners
- How engagement enhances the undergraduate academic experience

Integration with other Modules

This module is the foundation for the rest of the modules. It gives students a context for university-community engagement by describing MSU's history and mission as a land-grant institution. This module challenges students to accept the responsibility of engaging with community partners, and describes a process (as elaborated by the other modules) of how they may become engaged. It also presents examples of student community engagement projects.

"The 'me' perspective subsides when you visit impoverished areas that have polluted wells for drinking water, and a few dollars can feed one child school lunches for a month. Now it's something I think about every time I spend money. An international service experience has led me to ask how I can contribute to similar social issues in the future, and how I might convey these experiences to others and make them more aware."

-- Lisa Devereaux,
Accounting Senior and Student Site Leader, Amosco, Mexico,
Alternative Spring Break 2008

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Module 2: Community-Based Engagement: Power and Privilege

Why Learn about Power and Privilege?

For historical and contextual reasons, people differ in their levels of power, privilege, and control. These differences influence perceptions of what is right and wrong, the expected roles individuals have in society, and how people communicate with others. Understanding and being sensitive to differences allow people to communicate and work more effectively with each other.

"If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together."

--Words from an Aboriginal Activista Group
Queensland, 1970s

Integration with other Modules

This module illustrates how understanding and being sensitive to the differences in levels of power and privilege will help you engage more effectively with other people in the community. To learn how to work more effectively with community partners and groups, refer to Module 5 on Collaborative Negotiation.

Learning Objectives

After completing this module you will understand:

- How people differ in their levels of power and privilege
- How being sensitive to these differences allows people to communicate and work more effectively with each other
Module 3: Collaborative Negotiation

Why Learn about Negotiation?

Negotiation is a form of communication between partners that has the purpose of identifying their respective roles and expectations. Negotiation is a common problem-solving process. Resolving differences without damaging relationships is a useful skill for engaging in collaborative group work, building successful partnerships, and many other everyday situations.

"Collaborative negotiation is at the heart of good engagement practices. The history of community-university partnerships is strewn with the bleached out bones of broken partnerships where good hearted people, with good hearted intentions could not overcome the conflicts that arise when we work together."

Robert Brown
Associate Director, University Community Partnerships
MSU University Outreach and Engagement

Learning Objectives

In this module you will:

• Learn about negotiating dynamics
• Build negotiating skills

Integration with other Modules

At MSU, engagement partnerships are scholarly, community-based, collaborative, responsive, capacity-building, and for the public good. This module describes how to negotiate—a common problem-solving process with community partners. It builds on a growing set of understandings and practices which were outlined in previous modules. Module 1 describes MSU's history as a land-grant institution and the responsibility this places on students to be engaged. Module 2 explains that at the center of good partnering is the person who understands others by knowing themselves.

Negotiation is a common problem-solving process. Try to apply the concepts that you learn about in this module to everyday negotiation situations that you encounter, whether it be in your school or personal life, job, or community engagement work.
Module 4: Principles of Engagement: How to Make Groups Work

Why Learn about How to Make Groups Work?

We've all been part of work groups—in classes, churches, social organizations, political and social action initiatives—that didn't perform effectively. There are lots of reasons why groups fail. Sometimes they lack focus or they are operated with conflicting values. Perhaps individual members don't meet their commitments or one or two use the group as their personal stage to show off. Sometimes we aren't sure of our role within the group. Other times we know our role but other people who have more power than us dominate and we can't enact our role and have our voices heard. Have you ever experienced any of these situations?

Learning how to improve your group interactions will greatly increase the chances that your group will succeed and reach its goals.

Learning Objectives

In this module you will learn:

- How you can improve your interactions with your community partner by applying principles for good partnerships
- About the various elements that create effective partnerships

Integration with other Modules

At MSU, engagement partnerships are scholarly, community-based, collaborative, responsive, capacity-building, and for the public good. This module describes how to work responsibly with community partners. It builds on a growing set of understandings and practices outlined in previous modules. Module 1 describes an engaged student and how the scholarly engagement of community has grown from our land-grant foundations at MSU. Module 2 explains that at the center of good partnering is the person who understands others by knowing themselves. Module 3 provides a method of collaborative negotiation that produces wins for all partners.
Module 5: Capacity Building

"The most authentic thing about us is our capacity to create, to overcome, to endure, to transform, to love, and to be greater than our suffering."

~Ben Okri, Nigerian novelist and poet

Integration with other Modules

At MSU, engagement partnerships are scholarly, community-based, collaborative, responsive, capacity-building, and for the public good. This module explains in more detail than in Module 4 why a capacity building approach to community engagement is valuable and how mutual respect for talents, skills, and assets that each partner brings to the collaboration strengthens individuals and communities. Module 1 describes MSU's history as a land-grant institution and the responsibility this places on students to be engaged. Module 2 explains that at the center of good partnering is the person who knows others by knowing themselves. Module 3 provides a method of collaborative negotiation that produces wins for all partners. Module 4 describes how to work responsibly with community partners.

Why Learn about Capacity Building

Capacity building is a process that strengthens the abilities of people to take collective action towards creating healthy ecosystems, vital economies, and social well-being. Capabilities may be built at the individual, team, organization, community, or society level. Capacity building approaches to community work, regardless of field or discipline, need to be context-sensitive, dynamic, and on-going.

Learning Objectives

In this module you will:

- Learn how to define capacity and capacity building
- Understand the difference between capacity building and problem-focused approaches to community work
- Identify five levels of capacity building and seven types of community assets
- Recognize the context sensitive, dynamic, on-going nature of capacity building
One Instructor’s Perspective

• Embedded the modules in the curriculum.
• The content of the modules helped him think about the content and structure of course.
• All the modules were helpful particularly as introductions to subjects and guideposts along the way as the course unfolded.
• The subject matter of the modules became more relevant as the class progressed – as additional context was put around the modules by instructor.
One Instructor’s Perspective

- Module 5 was most helpful.
- The big ah-ha moments came within this module.
- It tied everything together for students in the class and pointed toward a model of engagement that the college is employing.
- Module 3 and 4 were the next most helpful, followed by 1 and 2.
- Students actually used Module 3 to negotiate a change in the curriculum with the instructor.
- Instructor is thinking about concentrating more of the class on Module 3, 4, and 5.
Additional Faculty Feedback

- Module 1 was the most helpful for my first year/freshman students. It helped introduce them to the concept of land-grant and how they as students fit into the “big picture” of the university's mission.

- Modules 2 and 3 combined helped give the students a sense of “who they are” in their individual contexts and in working with others. Students often do not realize that they can be perceived as having ‘power’; nor are they aware that they can appropriately negotiate their opportunities.

- Module 2 raises many questions for students about who they are and how they interrelate. The in-class exercise can be troubling for some. It is critical to provide sufficient time for debriefing and reflection.

- Young students often see their service-learning and community engagement as “helping”, even “saving” constituencies. Modules 2 and 5, individually and collectively, help students to better understand their roles as “engagers” vs. “helpers.”
Tools of Engagement Research Partnership

- Auburn University
- Michigan State University
- Penn State University
- HBCU Network
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Four primary levels to examine:

1. **Usability**: student and faculty reactions to the ToE modules; includes perception of ease of use, appropriateness of content difficulty, perception of helpfulness

2. **Learning**: increase in knowledge and value of engagement

3. **Behavior**: influence on behavior; includes frequency of engagement and quality of engagement

4. **Organizational benefits**: how do the above influences benefit the organization
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What seems feasible at this time:

- Assess usability (both from student and faculty perspectives) and content learning (from student perspective) with the focus of improving the modules.

- In a pilot approach, understand how the modules are being used by faculty (i.e., describe uses, advantages and disadvantages of the various approaches).

- In a pilot approach, understand how student and faculty characteristics as well as teaching strategies influence the effectiveness of the modules.
Rationale for concentrating on levels 1 and 2 as well as focus on evaluating the modules as a teaching tool at this time:

a. A more complex evaluation design, capable of accounting for differences between institutions, courses, students, faculty and teaching strategies, requires understanding of the current status of ToE as a teaching tool (e.g., strengths, limitations).

b. Impact on behavior may require longitudinal data collection/analysis, which will then demand detailed and coordinated planning and implementation across institutions.

c. Impact on organizational benefits will require understanding of each institution’s mission for outreach and engagement and, as a consequence, possible different measures for the different institutions.

– At this stage, a human subjects protection application might be stronger if concentrated on (a), (b), and (c) above.
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Discussion Questions

– Do you think Tools of Engagement are a viable way to introduce undergraduate students to the concept of university-community engagement?

– Do you think Tools of Engagement develop student’s community-based research and engagement skills?

– Do you think Tools of Engagement support the work of faculty in introducing and integrating concepts of engagement into curricula?

– Do you think Tools of Engagement assist with training the next generation of engaged scholars?
Contact Information

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