

Interim Progress Report: Community-University Service, Learning, and Research Partnerships

History

In October 2006, the Office of Public Service and Outreach at the University of Virginia (U.Va.) and the Charlottesville/Albemarle Commission on Children and Families (CCF) held a roundtable to discuss research and learning partnerships between U.Va. and the surrounding community. Present were 23 individuals from 13 departments across U.Va., three representatives from the Provost's Office, and 12 community members representing local human service agencies. This roundtable sought to celebrate partnerships already underway, to connect faculty doing this type of work, and to begin to think about ways to unify and formalize these partnerships. The roundtable participants indicated that they felt there was increasing support at U.Va. for research and learning partnerships but that more work was needed to further legitimize, formalize, connect, support, and expand the community-university partnerships for learning and research. Therefore, the Office for Public Service and Outreach and CCF established a joint work group. The Engaged Scholars' Work Group convened in January 2007.

Work Group Charge

The charge of the Engaged Scholars' Work Group has been to develop a strategic plan to optimally foster Community-University Service, Learning, and Research Partnerships. These partnerships should enhance the quality of life in a diverse community, as well as the quality of the learning experiences and community-based research opportunities at U.Va. The work group would:

- (a) identify national best practice models for community-university service, learning, and research partnerships,
- (b) identify community and university needs, assets, and challenges regarding service, learning, and research collaborations as they specifically relate to a potential partnership(s), and
- (c) make specific recommendations for action and implementation of a partnership(s) that can be sustained.

Work Group Membership

Initially, the Office of Public Service and Outreach and CCF invited partners to the work group who (1) expressed interest at the roundtable in October 2006, and (2) who were known to be already engaged in community-university partnerships. This group has been sustained by their common interest and enthusiasm for this work, and there has been a great deal of discussion about including additional community members on the work group. Megan Raymond, Acting Director of University Outreach, and Maryfrances Porter, Coordinator of Research and Planning at CCF, have staffed the work group (i.e., convened meetings, set agendas, recorded minutes, etc.). See Appendix A for a current membership list.

Work Group Process

To accomplish this charge, the work group broke out into two subcommittees, one to explore best practices and one to explore successes, assets, needs, and challenges for community-university partnerships. The overall work group, as well as each subcommittee, sought to have co-chairs: one person from U.Va. and one person from the community. A Steering Committee of the chairs and the work group staff was also established.

The work group met three times in Spring, 2007, before the subcommittee structure was established. Since that time, there have been eight additional meetings (two steering committee, three individual subcommittee meetings, and three full work group meetings). There have also been at least three additional small group meetings of individuals working on specific tasks. Two U.Va. student research assistants have helped with this work: Amanda Steiner – Graduate Student in Clinical Psychology, College of Arts and Sciences, and Rebecca Sayre – Undergraduate Student, College of Arts and Sciences.

Work Group Accomplishments

1. The work group has surveyed the field and presents several definitions of types of work done by universities in and with communities (Appendix B).
2. The work group presents a review of best practices in service, learning, and research partnerships at universities around the country.
 - a. The review began with the identification of 12 centers for community-university partnerships. Their websites were explored and summarized in a report (see Appendix C).
 - b. Based on the information in this report, six centers that most closely resembled models potentially thought to be applicable to U.Va./community needs were identified for individual follow-up calls. Work group members made calls to these centers to collect more specific information about how their centers evolved and functioned (see Appendix D).
 - c. In August/September 2007, a survey was conducted of 47 faculty known to be involved in service, learning, and research partnerships, as well as of 76 supervisors of human service oriented community agencies (i.e., the Thomas Jefferson Area Health Department, the Jefferson Area Board of Aging, the United Way – Thomas Jefferson Area, the Monticello Area Community Action Agency, Charlottesville/Albemarle Public Schools). Summaries of the results are presented in Appendix E.
3. The work group is currently summarizing best practices in outcome measurement reported by groups around the country seeking to reflect the impact of community-

university partnerships.¹ This is also a question being asked during calls to centers as part of the review of best practices.

Interim Findings

While there is still work to be done identifying specifically what would be needed to support, enhance, and expand service, learning, and research partnerships between U.Va. and the community, the work group is ready to present findings to date.

Successes and Assets

Since the October 2006 roundtable, which was the first time that faculty, staff, and community leaders came together explicitly to discuss community-university partnerships, the work group's research has uncovered the following successes in and assets for existing community-university partnerships:

1. Stated institutional mission: The work group has uncovered a great deal of energy and momentum for service, learning, and research partnerships going back to the inception of the university, as evidenced in U.Va.'s Statement of Purpose and Goals:

To offer to the local community, the Commonwealth of Virginia, and the nation the various kinds of public service and intellectual and cultural activities which are consonant with the purposes of the University. (2006-07 Undergraduate record, p. 6)

See Appendix F for a comprehensive list of applicable citations from institutional documents.

2. A track record of successful partnerships: Whether supported through formal courses, informal course credit/independent study, student internships, or individual faculty interests/relationships, there are many productive service, learning, and/or research partnerships already formed that enhance learning and knowledge. These partnerships are making great contributions to the community, to the learning environment at U.Va., as well as to academic knowledge (Appendix G documents just a few of some of the current partnerships).
3. The community's commitment to making data-driven decisions: As evidenced in part by the work of CCF (see www.ccfinfo.org), as well as the work being done by a partnership between the Institute on Aging and the Jefferson Area Board of Aging, the Charlottesville/Albemarle communities are committed to making data-driven decisions and promoting the use of evidence-based practices in service delivery. Thus, there are many possible intersections of community and university learning/research priorities.

¹ Included in this survey are the applications of the recipients of the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification (<http://www.compact.org/carnegie/applications>), and the work by Council on Extension, Continuing Education, and Public Service, which is a group of the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges. Additionally, Princeton University recently received a Learn and Serve Grant from the Corp for National and Community Service (a division of Americorps). \$250,000 of this award provides sub-grants to other universities; thirty-one partner universities are working with Princeton to develop instrumentation to evaluate the impact of community-based research.

4. Community/University commitment to partnering: As information on existing partnerships has been gathered (from the October 2006 roundtable forward), increasingly evident is the strong commitment many faculty, staff, and students have to their learning and research endeavors being directly related to enhancing their community (whether it be in Charlottesville/Albemarle, the region, the Commonwealth, the country, or the world). Additionally, when agency supervisors were surveyed, it was evident that community agencies value the enhancement of programming, community resources, problem resolutions, and knowledge with University expertise. Just since the work group has been convened (i.e., between January and October 2007), and without any advertisement, Megan Raymond and Maryfrances Porter have been approached on at least a dozen occasions by community agencies looking for help with research projects – not including the numerous projects occurring with CCF.

Barriers and Needs

The work group's goal is to *foster Community-University Service, Learning, and Research Partnerships that enhance the quality of life in a diverse community, as well as the quality of the learning experiences and community-based research opportunities at U.Va.* The Engaged Scholars' research demonstrates that many of the extant partnerships working toward this goal exist despite significant barriers and challenges that limit the opportunities for and impact of this work. In order to fully support existing partnerships and forge new ones, the following needs and barriers should be addressed:

1. Common definitions are needed: As can be seen in Appendix B, there are numerous terms being used to describe the work that faculty and students do in the community. There are no common terms established to describe the work that constitutes an academically meaningful partnership for service, learning, or research; without common definitions it is impossible to generate meaningful discussion about and reflection on these activities.
2. Substantive institutional support is needed: Substantive institutional support is needed to sustain these partnerships, to ensure high-quality engaged teaching/learning and research befitting U.Va.'s reputation, and to promote a climate of civic engagement and social responsibility. Best practice research demonstrates that centers for community-university partnerships at peer institutions were developed with significant executive leadership.²

² For example: Stanford's Haas Center for Public Service was initiated by the university President who wished to see more Stanford students interning in Washington DC. At the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, a Chancellor's Intellectual Climate Task Force, working to revamp the undergraduate curriculum, and they based their recommendations on work done by a Public Service Roundtable. This Roundtable was composed of a group of faculty already committed to engaged scholarship, who used the Roundtable for support and networking, and to begin to leverage funding. At Princeton, the Associate Dean of the College championed the wishes of students, who presented the idea to him. The University of Pennsylvania's program was founded by an Associate Vice President. At the University of California-San Francisco, the Executive Vice Chancellor called for a Task Force to examine identify best practices and recommend an engaged scholarship model.

3. A formal infrastructure to document, support, and assess partnerships is needed: In the survey administered to the community agency supervisors, a lack of infrastructure to help establish partnerships was cited as the most common barrier to working with the university. There is no mechanism to record existing partnerships, facilitate new partnerships, provide a gateway for the community to access university resources (and vice versa), support (administratively or financially) partnerships, document and demonstrate the impact of partnerships, or maintain a store of institutional wisdom from past successes and failures.
4. Facilitation of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process is needed: There is no standard algorithm by which faculty/students may identify those community-based projects needing IRB approval, or those likely to be exempted. The IRB process can be daunting, time consuming, and confusing for community partners – even when submitted with a seasoned faculty researcher. Additionally, faculty have differing opinions regarding what types of community-based research require IRB approval. This can lead to missed opportunities, misunderstandings, misgivings, and mistakes. A dialogue with the IRB must be initiated so that the policies and procedures regarding this specialized, community-based research and learning can be clarified. Furthermore, there needs to be a vehicle for communicating these policies and procedures throughout the university and within the community.
5. Time constraints and scheduling challenges need to be addressed: Two of the top three barriers reported by faculty *and* community agency supervisors were being too busy to supervise students/conduct community-based research, and scheduling issues. For partnerships to be successful, faculty, students, and community partners need support that adds capacity and facilitates the inherent difficulties of meshing the academic, fiscal, and standard calendars. Thoughtful planning/coordination, technical assistance, mediation, and development of longer-(than one semester)-term opportunities would ease the issues with time and scheduling.
6. Incentives/acknowledgement for faculty are needed: While individual faculty's sense of community responsibility steers them to work in the community, there are few institutional incentives and development opportunities to support faculty time and efforts, thereby legitimizing and expanding the amount and type of work in which they are able to participate. Nearly 27% of faculty already committed to engaged scholarship cited a lack of credit by U.Va. for these activities as a barrier to becoming more involved. The quality of work products cannot be ensured for either the community or the university without fostering a climate and infrastructure that supports the highest quality of peer-reviewed engaged scholarship.
7. Incentives/acknowledgement for students are needed: Students interested in engaged scholarship face several of the same barriers as faculty. Undergraduate students' and graduate students' level of involvement will be limited if academic credit, "buying" graduate students out of teaching requirements, or financial incentives/fellowships/mini-grants are not available. Students seeking to independently establish internships/research assistantships in the community lack needed academic supervision, and do not have any

formal obligation holding them through to the end of the project (both potential liabilities for agencies who might otherwise be enthusiastic about partnering).

8. Incentives/support for community partners are needed: When partnerships develop haphazardly and idiosyncratically, some become beacons of success, while others fail, potentially contributing to a sense of distrust between the community and the university. Individuals in the community find it nearly impossible to navigate U.Va.'s structure to find researchers and instructors, interested in their needs and with the time and resources to help address them. Partnerships based solely on relationships between individuals are not sustainable when those individuals leave their positions at U.Va. or in the community. Thus, each time individuals in the community express a need, they may have to start from the beginning to find and establish partnerships, navigate a new set of policies, etc. If the partnership does not endure or the product is substandard, an individual can easily dismiss the university as a whole rather than problem-solve how to avoid such difficulties in the future. The reverse is also true. When U.Va. members seek partnerships with the community, the same challenges can prevent partnerships from occurring or being optimally productive and long-lasting.
9. Meaningful measurement of impact is needed: There are several groups around the country exploring the best methods for measuring the impact of engaged scholarship. Since partnerships between U.Va. and the community are currently developed ad hoc by individuals, there is no consistent measurement of the impact of these partnerships on (a) faculty development, (b) student learning, (c) the university/learning environment, (d) community partners, or (e) the overall health and well-being of the community. Measurement of impact is imperative to ensure that this work is having the desired effect on the ultimate goal: *to foster Community-University Service, Learning, and Research Partnerships which enhance the quality of life in a diverse community, as well as the quality of the learning experiences and community-based research opportunities at U.Va.*
10. Stable financial support is needed: As we know, course development, and even small scale research, requires resources. While there are many granting mechanisms for large research, many of the community-generated projects are too small, too unique, or require a timeframe not conducive to traditional funding mechanisms. Large research projects take substantial buy-in and resources to pursue. Ad hoc individual partnerships are not likely to effectively or efficiently leverage participation, attract sustained grant funding, and other financial supports. Best practices research (see Appendices C and D) demonstrated that engaged scholarship activities at other high-ranking universities are funded through a combination of several sources, including community and business contributions, as well as private foundation and public grants. Additionally, the infrastructure is sustained by a combination of substantial endowments and university support that ensures the day-to-day operations of the center.

Interim Recommendations

The work group has examined the research findings, and recommends the following actions.

1. This work group's research and the actions of peer institutions show that the development of an office of community-university partnerships for engaged scholarship will garner more resources to sustain a meaningful impact if there is **a formal call from U.Va.'s institutional leadership for this work**. A "formal call" could take the form of an upper-level administrator making a formal request for a product from the work group, or a presence on the work group's Steering/Executive Committees (or the appointment of a representative to the Steering/Executive Committees).
2. **An office of community-university partnerships should support engaged scholarship** or public engagement as defined in Appendix B. Therefore, the infrastructure should have an emphasis on academic service learning/service learning, and community-based research, but not to the exclusion of other activities that represent meaningful community-university partnerships, provide needed services to the community, and enrich the learning environment for students and faculty.
3. **Community should be defined broadly** and not be limited to the Charlottesville/Albemarle area. Although it is likely that emphasis will be placed on serving the needs of the community most adjacent to the university, engaged scholarship must be defined by the type of project, process, or people, not solely by the location of the work. The community should not be considered only those concerned with human service provision, but rather encompass all aspects of community life.
4. **An office of community-university partnerships should be established** with a formal infrastructure, including staff and resources. The work group will make final recommendations regarding the specific infrastructures and resources needed. These recommendations will be based on best practices research and capitalize on the strengths and assets noted above. The office should:
 - a. Serve as a gateway for partnership opportunities.
 - b. Facilitate partnerships and save faculty/staff/community time by providing templates for projects (i.e., tool kits, syllabus archive, etc.), offering technical assistance (i.e., helping the community articulate research questions, providing information/structure for community supervision of student research assistants/interns, facilitating conflict resolution between partners, helping with course development, etc.), providing orientation to the community/university policies and procedures as necessary (i.e., IRB policies and procedures), planning ahead and facilitating the synchronization of the academic, fiscal, and standard calendars.
 - c. Support legitimizing, and holding to the highest academic standards, the processes and products of community-based research and academic service learning. The office will provide information about opportunities for publication and professional presentations, as well as support a climate promoting civic engagement and social responsibility.

- d. Maximize the public and private support for this work, by identifying and responding to RFPs and potential donor designated contributions.
 - e. Provide competitive mini-grants for faculty, students, and potentially the community.
 - f. Provide an opportunity, through standardized measurement of outcomes, satisfaction, and products, to demonstrate impact of partnerships for faculty development, student learning, university engagement, and community well-being.
 - g. Support the development of a set of courses and/or an academic emphasis (i.e., a minor or ‘Public Scholars’ designation) promoting engaged scholarship at the student level with necessary support (i.e., resources for faculty developing courses, articulation of community questions to be addressed by courses, consultation with other universities with successful service-learning models, etc.).
5. An office of community-university partnerships should **accept broad responsibility to use knowledge to improve the quality of life in our communities**, to address social inequities, and to promote mutual understanding.
 6. An office of community-university partnerships should **include programming and support for faculty, staff, undergraduate students, and graduate students across all schools at U.Va., in addition to community members**, including individuals expressing interest in working on community-level needs, as well as private, government, and non-profit organizations/agencies.
 7. An office of community-university partnerships should **ensure a 50% community presence in its development and management**, i.e., co-community and university directors, significant community presence on governing boards, etc.
 8. As evident among peer institutions with successful offices of community-university partnerships for engaged scholarship, **a university director of such an office should be located in the Provost’s office**, to ensure active participation with the academic administrative center of the institution.³

³ Examples of success from peer institutions: The University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill has recently appointed a Vice Chancellor for Public Service and Engagement who reports to the Chancellor for the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. The University of Pennsylvania has an Associate Vice President and Director for the Center for Community Partnerships. The University of California-Los Angeles has an Associate Vice Chancellor for Community Partnerships who reports to Acting Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost. The University of Minnesota has an Associate Vice President for Public Engagement who reports to Office of the Senior Vice President for System Academic Administration (they have a separate Provost). At Bates University, the Director of the Harvard Center reports to Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of the Faculty.

Next Steps

The next steps presented here outline what is required to fulfill the charge of the work group and fully promote the development of a formal infrastructure supporting engaged scholarship.

1. The work group would like to restructure, and rename itself, beginning in January 2008:
 - a. All co-signers of the Declaration of the Community University Research and Service Partners (as described below) will be part of the Community University Research and Service Partnership (previously the Engaged Scholars' Work Group, which would continue to be a work group of U.Va. and CCF, staffed by Megan Raymond and Maryfrances Porter⁴).
 - b. A core group of dedicated individuals will serve on a Steering Committee that will meet 2 to 4 times a year to advise the work plan and products of the work group, as well as event planning. This Steering Committee will initiate a community partner recruiting effort with the goal of having 50% of its members from the university and 50% from the community. The new Steering Committee likely would include willing individuals currently on the Engaged Scholars' work group.
 - c. A subgroup of Steering Committee will serve on an Executive Committee that will meet monthly to more closely develop the work plan, the writing of the final strategic plan, and plan events.

2. A Declaration of the Community University Research and Service Partners, presented in Appendix H, will function to demonstrate the investment and willingness of U.Va. faculty, staff, and the community to partner with the aim of enhancing the quality of life in a diverse community, as well as the quality of the learning experiences and community-based research opportunities at U.Va. through activities associated with engaged scholarship (i.e., academic service learning and community-based research). The work group will continue to evolve this Declaration with the goals of:
 - a. Documenting broad interest for an office of community-university partnerships for service, learning, and research,
 - b. Documenting current partnerships,
 - c. Developing standardized measures of impact for U.Va., the faculty, students, and the community,
 - d. Establishing a basic framework on which to base the development of a formal infrastructure, i.e., serve as a rudimentary gateway for the community, suggest basic parameters and expectations for partnerships, express a commitment to problem-solving when conflicts arise, express a commitment to exploring funding support for these activities, express an interest in networking and sharing ideas, etc.

⁴ By virtue of the funding mechanisms and mission of CCF, Maryfrances Porter will not be available to support partnerships or staff initiatives outside the Charlottesville/Albemarle community or those that fall outside the CCF mission.

3. The work group will explore possibilities for increased administrative and/or student researcher support for the work group's activities.
4. The work group will continue to more systematically document and celebrate existing partnerships and their products.
5. The work group will continue to explore best practices in measuring the impact of engaged scholarship for faculty, students, universities, and communities.
6. The work group will continue to identify barriers and needs in engaged scholarship at U.Va. and in the community.
7. The work group will continue to explore best practices in faculty development associated with engaged scholarship including, but not limited to, standards for engaged scholarship work/products, buying faculty out of teaching, financial incentives/mini-grants for course development and/or engaged research, funding graduate assistants, etc.
8. The work group will explore possible public and private funding mechanisms for engaged scholarship.