

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

Executive Summary

The Office for Public Service and Outreach at the University of Virginia (U.Va.) and the Charlottesville/Albemarle Commission on Children and Families (CCF) established a joint work group with the charge to develop a strategic plan to optimally foster Community-University Service, Learning, and Research Partnerships. *The goal of these partnerships would be to 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' Work Group convened in January 2007, and since that time, has conducted research into national best practices, as well as into faculty and community successes and barriers to partnering.

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).

The Charlottesville/Albemarle community is characterized by active engagement of its citizens and its institutions. U.Va.'s faculty, students, and leaders, as well as many of the community's service agencies recognize the multiple resources of wisdom, skill, experience, and honest curiosity that reside on both sides of the University/Community equation. A variety of projects have demonstrated the great potential of those resources to serve the *mutual* goals of the academy and the community. However, many of these resources are profoundly underutilized.

The work group's research has identified the following major barriers and needs hindering the opportunities for, and impact of, mutually beneficial community-university partnerships for service, learning, and research:

1. Common definitions to foster meaningful understanding of and reflection on partnership activities and products.
2. Substantive institutional support.
3. Formal infrastructure to support partnerships.
4. Facilitation of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process in cases involving community partnerships.
5. Scheduling challenges and time constraints.
6. Incentives/acknowledgement for faculty investments.
7. Incentives/acknowledgement for students' investments.
8. Incentives/support for community investments.
9. Meaningful documentation of impact through assessment of outcomes.
10. Stable financial support.

Based on the work group's research and comparative analyses, the following eight (8) actions are proposed to address these barriers and needs such that U.Va. and community resources may be optimally mobilized:

1. **A formal call from U.Va.'s institutional leadership** requesting the work group make additional recommendations for how to support community-university partnerships such that engaged scholarship maximizes existing resources and sustains a meaningful impact.
2. An office of community-university partnerships should be **focused on engaged scholarship** or public engagement, as characterized by a focus on academic service learning/service learning, and community-based research.
3. **Community should be defined broadly** – by the type of project, process, or people, not solely by the location of the work.
4. **An office of community-university partnerships for engaged scholarship should be established** with a formal infrastructure, including staff and resources, necessary to ensure that the highest standards of academic rigor are achieved. This office will:
 - a. Serve as a gateway for, and facilitate, partnership opportunities,
 - b. Support holding to the highest academic standards the processes and products of community-based research and academic service learning, including recommendations regarding the role of engaged scholarship in the promotion and tenure process,
 - c. Maximize the public and private financial support for this work,
 - d. Provide an opportunity to measure and demonstrate impact of partnerships for faculty development, student learning, university engagement, and community well-being, and
 - e. Support the development of a set of courses and/or an academic emphasis promoting engaged scholarship activities.
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, undergraduate students, and graduate students across all schools at U.Va., as well as for community members**.
7. An office of community-university partnerships should **ensure a 50% community presence in its development and management**.
8. **A university director of an office of community-university partnerships should be located in the Provost's office**, to ensure active participation with the academic administrative center of the institution.

Going forward, the work group will seek a formal expression of investment and willingness from U.Va. faculty and staff, and community members to partner on academic service learning and community-based research for the common good. The work group plans to continue its research and understanding of national best practices as it prepares its final report.