EXPLORING THE CHALLENGE OF DOCUMENTING AND MEASURING CIVIC ENGAGEMENT ENDEAVORS OF COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES: Purposes, Issues, Ideas

Campus Compact
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What do we mean by engagement?

The concept of engagement began to enter the higher education vocabulary in 1994, when Russell Edgerton, then President of the American Association of Higher Education (AAHE), focused on the topic of "engaged institutions" at the AAHE Annual Meeting (Edgerton 1994). Since that time, the term engagement has been gradually defined and applied to a variety of institutional/community relationships and a range of institutional strategies meant to link the work of the academy with public action and societal priorities. Today, public scholarship, engagement, the concept of the campus as a citizen and the status and the value of linking community contributions to the curriculum and educational goals of an institution (e.g. service-learning; problem-based learning using community concerns and topics) are topics of growing interest to institutions of all types.

The use of the term "engagement" was further developed in a report prepared by the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities in 1999 that has been widely studied by institutions seeking to adopt or expand their engagement agenda. The Kellogg Commission Third Report, Returning to Our Roots: The Engaged Institution introduces the concept of engagement by suggesting that engaged institutions "have redesigned their teaching, research and extension and service functions to become more sympathetically and productively involved with their communities, however community may be defined" (p. vii). In the view of the mostly land-grant perspectives shaping the Kellogg report, it is not surprising that they see engagement as different from outreach or extension by its reciprocity and sharing. Fundamentally, this report suggests that engagement can enrich the student experience, and help change the campus culture in positive ways by enlarging opportunities for faculty and students to gain access to research and

new knowledge and by broadening access to various kinds of off-campus learning opportunities.

The "Presidents' Declaration on the Civic Responsibility of Higher Education" (Campus Compact, 1999) was prepared shortly after the Kellogg report, and approaches the importance of expanding higher education's acceptance of institutional public engagement from a different direction – that of using engagement in communities, through actions and teaching, to "renew our role as agents of our democracy." In this conception of engagement, the opening of academic work to public issues is focused strongly on leading students "to embrace the duties of active citizenship and civic participation." The Declaration, like the earlier Kellogg report, acknowledges this will require significant change in the culture and organization of institutions, and goes on to offer a practical strategy for an initial assessment of institutional involvement in civic work. The assessment also has been used as a tool for promoting campus exploration of the local interpretation of an academic civic mission and for identifying areas where change would expand the institution's civic impact on students, faculty, staff, and community.

These and many other publications have made the exploration of the role of engagement a national-level discussion. Simply said, there is a lot of activity going on across campuses and communities that is called engagement, but we are often hard pressed to find consistent and common elements in this work. There is still a tremendous amount of skepticism among many faculty about the academic relevance of community-based work or the political/organizational wisdom of surrendering the image of postsecondary institutions as places intentionally separate from society – mythical places of pure learning. There are also many different conceptions of what it means to be engaged. Both proponents and skeptics raise questions: To what degree can campuses become engaged in community matters? How is engagement necessarily or unintentionally changing academic culture, faculty work, curricula, reward systems, donor relationships, public funding, autonomy/accountability? How do we know this work is making a difference, and what defines quality? And many more.

At the same time, some campuses with advanced experience with engagement have begun to explore strategies for evaluating their efforts. At an institutional or program level, we observe that documenting the effects of engagement on student learning, student levels of social responsibility or, less commonly, the impacts on community capacity or faculty careers, can be a tool for expanding organizational change and acceptance of engagement as legitimate and appropriate academic work. In the knowledge-driven culture of academia, evidence that this work is having an impact on students and/or communities can help overcome some forms of skepticism and resistance to change. Few examples of systematic assessment at the campus level exist; more are evolving. Some of these examples are mentioned in this paper as

possible sources for exploring a larger question of measurement and assessment: Can we imagine a way to describe and/or measure civic engagement activities on a national level and what would be our goals for such a system?

Why Measure Civic Engagement?

First, we need to consider our motivations for asking such a question. Selection of a strategy and design of an effort requires us to state our goals and purposes. As in any exploratory study, we should begin by articulating the significance of the phenomenon of engagement and our basic interest in furthering our ability to define, describe, characterize, measure and perhaps even judge its quality. The reasons we seek to create measures or descriptors directly influence the types of measures we should seek, and the methods we use to develop and maintain them.

Academic Legitimacy. For example, do we believe that a system of measurement will enhance the legitimacy of engagement within the internal, traditional culture of the academy? If we can describe and measure this work, as we purport to do for other forms of academic work such as research, then will engagement become more central to the work of more institutions; will it become more widely accepted as important scholarly work and as a core responsibility of the academy? Some faculty want assurance that engagement activities such as service learning actually improve student acquisition of content and skills; others want assurance that it enhances the personal development of students and the acquisition of attributes related to social responsibility and a concern for building a just society. Some faculty seek evidence that engagement contributes to enhanced research productivity, applied scholarship, and other more familiar forms of academic work. For each set of expectations, different factors must be explored and different measures proposed.

Image and Reputation. A different view considers the role of image and reputation. This view holds that until engagement is linked in a meaningful way to power, prestige and resources, and until the quality and value of this work can be assessed in ways that are seen as valid by the professoriate and the public, it will remain a passionate interest of some individuals and some institutions but is not likely to become part of the core mission of the nation's colleges and universities. A somewhat cynical observer might say that the image of academic prestige is determined today by athletic prowess, the amount of federal sponsored research funding, and by the degree of selectivity of admissions. The American view of quality suggests that winners are inherently good, the wealthy are some combination of enviable and admirable, and the harder something is to acquire – the more valuable it must be. Though we know these stereotypes are terribly flawed, the fact remains that these factors and values are reflected heavily in current systems of ranking and

classification (except the athletic dimension, of course, which is primarily played out in the venues of the public media). The public has become accustomed to rankings and expects to use such comparative information in making decisions about selecting a college or about targets of philanthropy or personal involvement (Honan, 1995). Do we envision a descriptive or comparative system that makes engagement a tool for identifying superior institutions or for conferring the aura of prestige? If yes, how does that meld with the view that engagement is about the vital citizenship role of education in a democratic society, more than a tool for recognition?

Accountability. Do we seek to prove the worth of a strong postsecondary system in our economy and society? An interesting hypothesis may be to consider the possibility that the growing interest in engagement as academic work may be attributable in part to the growing pressure on colleges and universities to be accountable for their performance. Most states now impose some type of performance measurement on institutions, and more are surely in the works. Is it only coincidence that a renewal of interest in openly renewing the connection between higher education and public purposes is happening at the same time as pressures increase on institutions to prove their value to society? Governing boards and policy makers are asking increasingly penetrating questions about how well an institution is performing(Ewell and Jones 1996). If we can demonstrate the impact of public universities and colleges as economic engines and intellectual assets contributing to a higher quality of collective community life, perhaps this will respond to these public calls for accountability and for participation in economic and community development.

Different Civic Missions. Do we believe that in an environment of greater accountability and attention to performance, colleges and universities must become more distinct and specific about their mission, priorities, and goals? Will the concept of engagement or the notion of a civic mission be expressed differently for different institutions? Surely we can see already that the interpretation of the centrality of engagement activities is different for different types of institutions. Some focus on civic education, others on community-based research; there are many different conceptions of this work. Does that reflect differences in interest, in responsibility, or capacity? Or is such variety a necessary element of good practice in engagement because differences recognize distinctive needs and capacities of campus and community? How would these different priorities be recognized in a comprehensive system of measurement?

A focus on articulating the role of civic engagement in the mission of any institution may help lead us to understand that just as there are differences in institutional attention to and capacity for cutting-edge, futuristic basic research, there are likely similar differences in motivation and capacity for making engagement endeavors an intellectual priority of a particular campus'

academic agenda. Is our interest in measuring or describing this work an effort to provide better tools for individual campuses to explore this arena of scholarly work or do we mean to make it central to every institution?

Quality. Do we want to measure our engagement programs so as to describe their quality, capture best practices for dissemination, or identify areas for improvement? Many of the campus-based initiatives described below focus most strongly on this motivation. Civic engagement in its many forms is largely new work, especially to the degree that a campus truly seeks to engage in mutually-beneficial partnerships that recognize campus and community as shared sources of knowledge, achievement and innovation. A focus on these issues suggests strategies that focus on process and practice as well as outputs and outcomes. Most models also recognize that the perspectives of campus and community are different in terms of quality, satisfaction, results, and the need for improvement. Strategies for measurement must recognize the different constituencies involved and their different expectations, making evaluation complex but often meaningful. However, any strategy for assessing quality across campuses, rather than primarily within a single institution, likely runs the risk of being used not only as a tool for improvement, but also as a method of claiming superior quality or greater comparative achievement. Describing what we do as engaged institutions is relatively straight-forward; measuring how well we do the work of engagement can be constructive in improving performance but also invites competition and comparisons – for good and for bad.

Matching Measures to Purposes and Audiences. These may seem like extreme views, but they are only a few dramatic examples of the different types motivations that can be attached to a system of measurement or description of engagement endeavors. There are certainly others, including influencing public and private funders through evidence of impact. It is easy enough to articulate other combinations of these or additional alternatives; the point is that an exploration of methods for measurement and description should be framed by some understanding of the goals one may hold for the impact that a new measurement system will have on higher education as a culture and as an industry. Measurement strategies should have carefully articulated purposes and objectives because all such programs direct human attention and resources to specific issues.

This means that any measurement strategy must also consider the audience and potential uses and misuses of reported findings. Each of the above examples of motivations implies a combination of internal and external constituent audiences who articulate a vested interest in the outcomes of assessment of engagement. Assessment for improvement of program design and greater effectiveness may have our own faculty and partners as the primary audience, but other audiences might see findings that highlight areas where performance needs improvement as evidence of failure or low quality. Given

the organic and evolving nature of the partnerships that are the essential foundation of engagement work, any judgment of need for improvement as a mark of poor performance would almost always be misleading. Similarly, measurements of outcomes can be misinterpreted when one considers the difficulty of establishing causal relationships between program activities and changes in community.

These challenges may be, in part, why many early assessment models focus on process and relationships and satisfaction, more than outcomes. Even the most carefully designed systems will have unintended consequences, independent interpretations, and surprising applications. The Carnegie Classification System is the leading example of such a phenomenon in that its original purposes of grouping institutions for research and monitoring purposes were re-interpreted as tools for image development by institutions who chose to characterize descriptive classes as hierarchical ranks of excellence.

What Will be Measured?

The above discussion of motivation – why do we think we want to create strategies for measuring engagement work – has embedded within it the message that the motivations behind a measurement system also determine what will be measured. From the examples cited in this paper and in the Shedd & Wellman paper, we can see that various systems of measurement, classification, ranking, etc., focus on dimensions that serve the purpose and reinforce the object of the strategy itself. For example, accreditation emphasizes set standards since the primary mission of accreditation is to establish consistent levels of basic quality across similar programs and similar institutions. As accreditation also begins to support institutional mission-driven development, the nature and use of both the self-study and the institutional site visit associated with reaccreditation will come to include more sophisticated measures of institutional performance, including engagement. Drawing on some institutional experiments with assessing engagement activities (see section on Creating a System to Document and Measure Engagement and Community Impact) and on other sources that explore the dimensions of engagement and issues of institutional change, here are examples of dimensions that have already been raised as broad targets for measurement, and that relate to one or more of the motivations suggested for a measurement strategy:

- Student learning – academic
- Student learning – civic
- Institutional commitment – internal organizational factors
- Institutionalization; sustained involvement in engagement
- Partnership relationships; community involvement
- Impacts on faculty work
- Impacts on community capacity; changes in community conditions

Further development of local, state, or national systems for describing or measuring institutional efforts along those dimensions requires a very different design approach for each topic area. The goals, questions, constituent interests, analytical frameworks, and data collection issues are different for each dimension.

To date, most of the campus-based assessment efforts have focused on measuring impact, process and inputs/outputs related to the experience of participants, especially students. Less frequently, assessments focus on impacts or experiences of faculty and community members. Clearly, the work of assessing engagement is still in a formative stage. People are using assessments to simultaneously make the case for engagement, document levels of service and impacts on participants, study the organizational strategies, and identify facilitating and inhibiting factors and forces that warrant further attention in future engagement activities. Thus, the most common targets for measurement include:

- Levels of activity – hours of service, numbers of partnerships, quantity of services, numbers of courses
- Process issues – what worked well; what didn't work
- Identification of obstacles
- Documentation of impacts on student attitudes and aptitudes
- Faculty attitudes and concerns
- Community involvement and/or satisfaction

Some of these measures are more complex than others, some are simple outputs and tells us little about the impact of efforts or outcomes. In addition, the sophistication and the quality of institutional efforts are highly variable and mostly in early stages of development. This is not an unimportant revelation.

Engagement, as a concept and activity, is in its first phases of development as significant academic work, and these early institutional assessment efforts highlight factors of greatest interest to those seeking to advance engagement programs. This suggests that national strategies at this time would be most helpful if they contributed to exploring formative and practical dimensions important to the evolving understanding of how institutions make decisions about engagement, design/implement/sustain programs, develop faculty skills, and build effective relationships with the community. This approach could lay the essential foundation for the normative work to come later.

The Importance of Mission in Considering Measurement

There are two important beliefs that influence the arguments made in this paper: (1) engagement is not equally important to every institution, and (2)

measurement interests and strategies vary across the four key constituencies involved in the partnerships that are the foundation of engagement programming, thus requiring different strategies for students, faculty, community, and institutional assessments. These two beliefs combine to reinforce the notion that systems or comprehensive strategies for measuring, or better yet, encouraging institutional attention to engagement must be more instructive and descriptive than comparative. Differences in institutional and constituent histories, goals, capacities, contexts, and other similar dimensions that affect engagement commitments and project strategies guarantee high variability across institutions which must be respected. That said, there seem to be some ways we can think about creating some common factors or areas of interest that are consistent with our growing understanding of good practice.

To gain the most from interactions with the community, an institution must first be absolutely clear about its own mission. According to Holland (1999), "After decades marked by mission statements that are bland and non-distinct, many higher education institutions are deliberately embracing more specific missions and using these missions as a framework for establishing academic priorities, assessing institutional performance, and defining external relationships." In other words, missions matter! They become the basis for shaping the administrative structure, administrative processes, the organization and mix of academic programs, the philosophy and structure of the curriculum and the values and expectations that shape faculty roles and rewards and the campus perspective on the nature and assessment of scholarship. The demands and opportunities imposed by mission must pervade every aspect of campus organization, values and culture.

Any thoughtful self-examination or external assessment of engagement must begin with mission and its implications for

- Organizational leadership and policies
- External context and network of partnership and alliance
- Institutional infrastructure
- Faculty roles and rewards
- Faculty composition
- Disciplinary relationships
- Educational approaches and curricular design.

To interpret the capacity of an institution for engagement and to measure the impact of its community involvement on students, faculty, the community and the institution itself [the basic components of the assessment strategy developed by Portland State University (Driscoll et al, 1996) to assess service-learning courses] it is important to conduct a realistic examination of the competitive pressures both inside and outside the institution, the institutional capacity to initiate and support community involvement, the cultural traditions

and sometimes evolving identity and mission of the institution and external expectations and capacities to partner, in addition to a review of the impact of mission on leadership, infrastructure, faculty and students (Holland 1999).

In its report on The Engaged Institution, The Kellogg Commission called attention to three critical concerns that any institution wishing to enhance its level of engagement must address. Above all, institutions that have previously offered various forms of outreach and service must transform their thinking about service so that engagement becomes a priority across the campus and a central part of the mission. This view reflects the special influence of the land-grant mission on this report in that land-grants have a long history of “engagement” largely organized as separate extension divisions or continuing education programs. Now, land-grants, like other types of institutions are struggling to make engagement a more integrated, recognized and valued form of the core functions of the academic institution -- instruction and scholarship.

1. The institution must be organized to respond to the needs of today’s students and tomorrow’s, not yesterday’s.

2. The campus must enrich students’ experiences by bringing research and engagement into the curriculum and by offering practical opportunities for students to prepare for the world in which they will use their education.

3. The institution must put its critical resources of knowledge and expertise to work on the problems of the communities it serves and encourage and support engaged forms of scholarship.

These views of the impact of mission on the ways individual institutions think about evaluation and measurement is affirmed by Victor Borden in his research on measuring the traits of urban universities when he says that institutions are best served by devoting as much of their assessment efforts as possible to “broadly participative self-study, assessment, and program evaluation in the context of institutional mission and goals” (1999).

Thinking of these components and given the formative nature of engagement efforts at most institutions, how might we articulate some common dimensions of engagement practices as a method for identifying useful and practical methods for measurement? For the purposes of this paper, let us assume we want to build a system that helps institutions assess their level of commitment, their current capacity or level of activity, evidence of impacts attributable to current efforts, and areas for improvement, enhancement, or expansion.

What are the characteristics of an engaged institution?

As we explore approaches to measurement, one pathway may be to examine carefully what we have learned to date about the characteristics exhibited by institutions with advanced experience with engagement endeavors. What can these common features suggest about potentially measurable traits or elements of the organization and its actions? If we are moving toward congruence on some shared understanding of what engagement requires of an institution in the way it organizes itself, and the ways it interacts with partners, then perhaps this may lead to points that might be measured. Institutional reactions to these proposed characteristics highlights that different campuses and communities tend to see these elements in common, but with different degrees of importance and centrality. For example, one campus may believe its best strategy is to give emphasis to expanding the link of learning to engagement; another may perceive that its history means that policies and infrastructure must be developed before learning through engagement can begin to be addressed. In other words, learning to measure these elements could be a way of understanding institutional differences as well as stages of development and program maturity.

Here's one approach to defining engagement: An engaged institution is committed to direct interaction with external constituencies and communities through the mutually-beneficial exchange, exploration, and application of knowledge, expertise and information. These interactions enrich and expand the learning and discovery functions of the academic institution while also enhancing community capacity. The work of the engaged campus is responsive to community-identified needs, opportunities and goals in ways that are appropriate to the campus' mission and academic strengths, as well as its own history, culture and values. The interaction also builds greater public understanding of the role of the campus as a knowledge asset and resource.

Among the common features of an engaged campus are the following elements. These may suggest measurable elements common to most institutions exploring engagement.

- Articulates civic engagement in the campus mission and strategic plans, linking public issues to academic strengths and goals.
- Involves communities in continuous, purposeful, and authentic ways, with a deliberate approach to partnerships.
- Demonstrates a core commitment to learning through engagement endeavors.
- Links engagement to every dimension of campus life and decision-making.
- Develops and sustains policies and infrastructure that support engagement and community involvement.

- Demonstrates leadership and support for engagement at all levels of the organization from program and department chairs to the chief executive and board.
- Supports interdisciplinary work, including research, teaching and learning as part of the engagement agenda.
- Makes engagement visible and rewarded both internally and externally.
- Assesses engagement within the distinctive and often quite different perspectives and expectations of faculty, students and community.

Characteristics of Effective Partnerships

Similarly, we are developing increasingly sophisticated and systematic methods for describing the most elemental traits of effective campus-community partnerships. Just as looking at the organizational factors of the engaged campus might suggest points of measurement, we might also probe these lessons learned about successful partnerships as a possible source of measures related to relationships, community capacity, and other community impacts. Here is a basic conception of partnerships that could be probed for points of measurability.

- Joint exploration of separate and shared goals and interests
- Creation of a mutually rewarding and shared agenda of work
- Articulation of clear expectations, capacities, and expected consequences for each partner
- Success measured in both institutional and community terms
- Shared control of partnership directions, and/or resources
- Focus on shared strengths and assets
- Identification of opportunities for early success and regular celebration of shared work
- Focus on shared (two-way) learning and capacity building
- Attention to communications and open cultivation of trust
- Commitment to continuous assessment of the partnership itself, as well as of outcomes

Many of these characteristics of engaged institutions and of effective, sustainable partnerships are reinforced by their appearance in various institutional or multi-institutional efforts to create models and strategies for documenting and measuring civic engagement activities, campus-community relationships, and institutional change issues.

Creating a System to Document and Measure Engagement and Community Impact

Several critical questions must be considered as we seek to introduce a more systematic approach to describing and/or measuring engagement activities.

Can a consistent and effective system of measurement and assessment of the impact of engagement be developed using existing data bases and methodologies? The answer is - only in part, given the historic inattention to engagement factors in existing data collection systems. An interesting question is how might existing systems be revised to enhance their utility for measurement in this subject area. For example, Shedd & Wellman mention that IPEDS includes a data element for institutions on dollars spent on "public service." We know from institutional practice that the number for this element is reported in a variety of creative ways. A useful next step may be to help create a common method for defining and reporting that statistic to enhance the relevance and comparability of IPEDS data. Some researchers using the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) data base at UCLA have tried with mixed results to explore faculty attitudes toward engagement by looking at existing questions that have some relevance, but these questions could be greatly strengthened or new ones added based on our recent empirical studies of faculty. There may be similar adjustments that could be made to other systems of data collection and reporting that would increase availability of relevant data with minimum effort. This is an area that warrants direct exploration.

Can the results of any evaluation strategy support comparisons across institutions from either the institutional perspective or from the point of view of the community, given contextual differences of campuses and communities? And is that a desirable goal? Comparable measures raise special challenges, as we shall soon see.

What other sources might we look to for specific ideas about key concepts or suggested measures to consider? Or, given findings that when done well, civic engagement involves the integration of teaching, research and service, do we really want to isolate civic dimensions from other aspects of institutional effectiveness (Wellman, 1999). As we explore these questions and others, the experiences of individual campuses and groups of institutions offer some helpful clues. In this section, we will consider the following cases. There are, no doubt, many more examples we could study. A major national opportunity will be to identify and inventory examples, perhaps within the network of the Campus Compact member institutions and state Campus Compacts. This would be an invaluable resource that researchers could use to examine the experiences of these campuses and cohorts as models that might lead us to the principles that should guide the introduction of engagement into campus performance measures.

Examples of Institution-based and Collaborative Projects on Documenting and Evaluating Civic Engagement Endeavors

Some institutions, evaluation research projects, and several multi-institutional partnerships have made major efforts to develop and test systems for describing and assessing engagement activities. There are surely many others beyond those mentioned here; this particular set represents projects that have multiple years of application and experience, are drawn from a large sample of institutions, have a national focus, or have substantial support and visibility from interested funding organizations who hope to extend assessment models more broadly across higher education.

There are at least two good reasons for exploring these examples in even greater detail than can be presented here. First, there is a substantial amount of good groundwork being done that may reveal important lessons about the assessment strategies and their uses. Second, each presents examples of efforts to develop specific measures or indicators for specific dimensions of engagement and for different purposes and audiences. Some may focus more on inputs and outputs than on impacts and outcomes, but that may not be all bad news given that many institutions are still struggling with basic issues of the design of engagement endeavors and the development of sufficient capacity and critical mass. Some of these represent specific and innovative efforts that may have broad application to more comprehensive measurement strategies. What can we learn from these institutional efforts to describe, assess, measure, and/or document their engagement activities?

1. The Portland State University assessment model for evaluating community-based learning (Driscoll, et al, 1996) **and the expansion of this assessment model to a cohort of institutions engaged in community-based education and service.** (Gelmon et al l998).

The PSU model was designed to be a comprehensive examination of the effects of community-based learning on all the participants involved and on the host institution. The model itself has been described in detail (Driscoll et al 1996) and is useful for this discussion of measurement strategies because of its focus on developing specific variables and measurable indicators that are strongly linked with original program objectives.

The focus in this paper will be to consider how the model was expanded to accommodate the evaluation of the experiences of a cohort of institutions participating in a Pew Charitable Trusts funded project entitled The Health Professions Schools in Service to the nation (HPSISN). The goal of this project was to challenge institutions to integrate community service into their curricula and to promote student understanding of social responsibility and the public purposes of their chosen fields within the health care professions. Twenty

different sites were included in the study and included programs such as nursing, medicine, dentistry, pharmacy and public health.

The adaptation of the PSU assessment design to the HPSISN project was accomplished by shaping the research questions to the program objectives of the project itself. The parallel between the HPSISN assessment questions and the issues that should be addressed in any comprehensive evaluation of the impact of institutional engagement is very clear. The resultant evaluation questions were:

1. How has the HPSISN project affected university-community partnerships with respect to service learning in health professions education? *Purpose: to understand the influence of service learning on the nature and scope of university-community partnerships*

2. Through the HPSISN program, how has the introduction of service learning into health professions affected the readiness of students for a career in the health professions? *Purpose: to evaluate the effectiveness of service learning in preparing students to be successful in the current policy, economic social and culture contents of their professions.*

3. To what extent have faculty embraced service learning as an integral part of the mission of health professions education? *Purpose*: *to ascertain the level of faculty buy-in and commitment to the inclusion of service learning as a pedagogy.*

4. As a result of the HPSISN grant, how has the institution’s capacity to support service learning in the health professions changed? *Purpose*: *to establish the extent to which institutions are involved in service learning and the factors that contribute to sustained commitment.*

5. What impact does service learning in the health professions have on the participating community partners? *Purpose: to determine the effect of partnership with the institution and attendant service learning activities on the community partners.*

Once these questions were formulated, each one was expressed in terms of the purpose that each question served (shown in italics above) and then a set of phenomena were selected for study and a set of measurable indicators developed including an approach to obtaining data for each. The work is intensive and involves a blend of surveys, interviews, review of documents, focus groups and the analysis of journals kept by participants. The measurable indicators used in this study are too numerous to provide here, and some are specific to learning objectives related to health professions, but the conceptual framework behind this model shows potential for broader application.

Like the original PSU model, this adaptation recognized that the impact objectives and perceptions of outcomes were different for faculty, students, community partners and institutional leaders. Thus, the exploration of "how do we know our work is making a difference?" and "how do we improve our work?" necessarily involves focusing assessment of engagement activities on each constituent group as a separate unit of analysis. The resulting documentation and assessment report reviews how a multi-year engagement project actually worked, and whether it contributed to any lasting changes in the lives of the participants and in the capacity of institutions or communities. A model of this kind is best used for institutional improvement and enhanced communication among collaborating institutions.

The PSU approach also offers a methodology for enhancing the effective institutional or multi-institutional use of documents such as the Campus Compact Presidents' Fourth of July Declaration on the Civic Responsibility of Higher Education which is accompanied by a study guide that can focus the work of an institution on self-evaluation of its engagement efforts.[1]

2. **The Holland Matrix for analyzing institutional commitment to service** (Holland 1997)

The Holland Matrix provides a tool for campuses to use in evaluating the authenticity of their commitment to service and engagement, whether the campus is beginning its exploration or assessing its progress toward its mission-related vision for engagement. As Holland has pointed out (1997), "it is obvious that engagement in service-learning activities is playing out differently across institutions, and the level of commitment to service takes many different forms" (p. 30). The matrix is useful in the exploration of national strategies for measurement or description of engagement in that it provides a simple way of looking at the key organizational factors that are strong indicators of institutional commitment to engagement and that are strongly associated with sustainability. IUPUI has utilized this matrix to assess the degree of institutionalization of both service-learning and other forms of engagement, called in its context "professional service to the community" at institutions of many types (Bringle and Hatcher 2001). See Appendix A for a copy of the matrix and the assessment of level of campus commitment materials prepared at IUPUI to accompany the use of the matrix.

3. **The IUPUI approach to planning and assessing campus and community engagement**

The IUPUI approach is built on three underlying premises (Bringle and Hatcher 2001). First, civic engagement must connect to what matters to faculty.

[1] This material can be found at http://www.compact.org/resources/plc-declaration.html

Second, civic engagement will only be endorsed and embraced by senior leadership (i.e. presidents, provosts, deans, department chairs) if it is seen as an avenue for addressing institutional goals or problems. Finally, it is impractical and in fact, impossible to measure every aspect of engagement, both due to the complexity of the task and the many variations in institutional experience and constituent interests. This approach argues it is necessary to look for a small number of powerful indicators that represent an authentic engagement agenda at most if not all institutions. A necessary part of any civic engagement agenda is a curricular component. Hence community-based learning or service-learning can serve as an indicator species, similar to the presence of spotted owls in old-growth forest, for identifying a healthy engagement agenda.

To flesh out the assessment of service learning as a key measure of engagement, IUPUI has developed the Comprehensive Action Plan for Service Learning (CAPSL) which has been piloted by several institutions (Bringle and Hatcher 2001). In its current form, CAPSL leads the reviewer through ten steps from initial planning to full implementation (institutionalization) of service learning and analyzes the extent to which each element[2] has been fully incorporated into the thinking and activities of all participants from the perspectives of the institution itself, faculty, students and the community and proposes a number of measures and indicators of progress to evaluate progress through each phase (see Appendix B). This approach lends itself very well to both a research perspective and to institutional self-study guided by a strong grounding in evaluation. It, like the PSU model, is focused strongly on program improvement, and would not be especially suitable for external audiences or for institutional performance and accountability measurement. However, it may suggest specific areas where measurement would be practical.

4. **The Urban Universities Portfolio Project.**

The Urban Universities Portfolio Project (UUPP), which is funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts and sponsored by AHHE, brings together six urban public universities to develop documentation of their effectiveness for a variety of stakeholders. According to the information provided on the project web-site[3], “the institutional portfolios under development serve as vehicles for capturing the distinctive characteristics, work and accomplishments of urban public universities.” The six participating institutions---California State University-Sacramento, Georgia State University, IUPUI, Portland State University, University of Illinois at Chicago, and University of Massachusetts-Boston---are developing a shared description of urban public universities, measures of their

[2] planning, awareness, prototype, resources, expansion, recognition, monitoring, evaluation, research and institutionalization (see Bringle and Hatcher 1996)
[3] Information on the Urban Universities Portfolio Project can be found at www.imir.iupui.edu/portfolio/description.html

effectiveness that reflect the urban mission and characteristics and models for documenting several fundamental learning outcomes.

There are several common elements and themes in UUPP which all institutions address: access and support, student learning in the urban setting, diversity and pluralism, civic engagement, urban relevance of programs and scholarship and urban universities as intellectual and cultural resources to the city. According to the project summary, this comprehensive approach has already yielded some significant benefits to the participants. "The complexity of the project demands broad campus involvement, creating the occasion for large segments of the campus community to think together about how particular practices, programs and initiatives connect with one another and contribute to the overall institutional mission. This collaboration is helping to build institutional identity and community, developing and reinforcing shared visions and commitments that lead to meaningful institutional change and improvement." The project is also building a system of continuous monitoring and documentation of performance for both internal and external constituents as the work of the project unfolds and demonstrates continuous improvement and self-assessment.

Consistent with the project design to look at both common and unique mission traits, a visit to each institutional web-site reveals considerable variation in how each campus is presenting itself and what it has selected as components of its portfolio. Let us consider the host campus, IUPUI. The campus has chosen three sets of documentation to include in its electronic portfolio. They are effective student learning, excellent research and scholarship and exemplary civic engagement. Each topic has a set of portfolio entries that demonstrate the goals and although it clearly is a work in progress, the early entries are extremely interesting. Consider the entry for "effective student learning" as an example, which provides information about the goals, effectiveness and planned improvements to student learning through the following topics

- Providing access and support to a diverse student body
- Demonstrating student proficiency
- promoting student progress toward obtaining degrees and certificates
- providing lifelong opportunities for career and professional development to the region, the state and beyond.
- Collaborating with local government, business, p-12 education., and neighborhood groups to enrich student learning through opportunities for experiential and community-based learning.
- Providing high quality academic programs.

Each section will present campus goals, evidence of effectiveness of current strategies, plans for improvement and several exemplary programs.

The difficulty of characterizing civic engagement is strongly reflected in the UUPP project in that the six participants continue to wrestle with ways to measure and document their engagement endeavors. Here is how UUPP describes why civic engagement is one of the defining characteristics of the urban mission that the project seeks to address.

"Through collaborations and partnerships with area businesses and community agencies, the faculty, students, and staff at public urban universities contribute to the economic, social, cultural, and technological development of their urban regions. The civic engagement of public urban universities is more than a service mission. Urban universities bring their intellectual resources and expertise to bear on urban problems, thus improving quality of life in the city. This work permeates educational programs through such activities as internships, fieldwork and practica. It is expressed throughout the research and scholarship of faculty. It is manifest in the classrooms, laboratories, and libraries that are integrated throughout the urban community. Through their people and programs, urban universities promote the educational, professional, and cultural development for all citizens of the region."

The UUPP project continues to work on potential indicators of institutional effectiveness along the dimension of civic engagement. Some early suggestions in the search for indicators included the following general concepts.

- Collaborative sponsored projects with community partners
- Community-based services and facilities
- Involvement in PK-12 educational systems
- Student involvement in community-based initiatives such as America Reads or America Counts
- Significant regional and national events on campus or in the community but hosted by the university, that are open to the public

5. **The National Survey of Student Engagement.**

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is the first national survey designed to measure what colleges and universities contribute to student learning. (Note the different use of the word "engagement" in this survey - meaning engagement in various types of learning experiences.) It compiles responses to a survey from 63,000 first –year and senior students at 276 colleges and universities about the extent to which they participate in classroom and campuses activities. In the survey under the category of "enriching educational experiences," students were asked about their community service and volunteer work and about their participation in community-based work associated with a regular course and internships. 63

percent of seniors had participated in community service and 41% had enrolled in one or more service-learning courses. Of course, the many different ways campuses use the terms “community service” and “service learning course” makes interpretation of this finding a challenge. Should volunteer community service be weighed equally with academic, course-based service learning when research on cognitive and developmental impacts suggests real differences in those types of programs?

The authors of the study reflected upon how this documentation might contribute to thinking about educational effectiveness, a category given an “incomplete” in the Measuring Up 2000 report. The options include identifying colleges and universities where students are highly engaged in certain educational practices as a way to measure overall institutional effectiveness and comparing these findings to the overall averages of comparable institutions, which, in the case of the NSSE study, were arrayed according to Carnegie classifications.

6. The East/West Clearinghouses for the Scholarship of Engagement.

The East/West Clearinghouses for the scholarship of engagement[4] sponsors the National Review Board for the Scholarship of Engagement to provide external peer review and evaluation of faculty scholarship of engagement. They also provide consultation, training, and technical assistance to campuses who are seeking to develop or strengthen systems in support of the scholarship of engagement and provide a faculty mentoring program with opportunities for less experienced faculty to learn from the outreach experiences of more seasoned outreach scholars.

The emphasis of this project is primarily on the faculty experience and the focus is to validate the scholarship of engagement by offering both strategies and approaches to the documentation and assessment of this work. To that end, they have identified the following “criteria” as key areas for evaluating the quality of faculty work related to engagement:

1. Goals/Questions
2. Context of theory, literature, "best practices"
3. Methods
4. Results
5. Communication/Dissemination
6. Reflective Critique

[4] More information can be found on the East/West Clearinghouses website at www.universityengagement-scholarship.org/index.html

By offering campus and faculty access to a panel of national reviewers who can provide external input to campus deliberations about promotion and tenure decisions, the project hopes to both expand the scholarly value of community-based scholarship and to refine measures of quality.

The Challenges of Designing Measures

"Because the stakes are so high and the tasks of management and oversight so difficult, chief executives and trustees should be discussing what the institution is trying to do, how to measure and monitor progress, and what kind of information---in what form and how often----the board should receive in order to exercise its oversight function." (Barbara E. Taylor in Honan 1995). This paper has already discussed the importance of articulating our motivations and goals for assessment or documentation strategies. Why we want evaluative data and how we want to use the findings shape the design and selection of elements to be measured and the methods for collecting and analyzing data.

Performance indicators must be seen as part of a wider management philosophy whose working parts must be effectively aligned to ensure that the information collected is valid, worth the cost of collection, and useful for informed decision-making (Ewell and Jones 1996). For this reason, performance indicators and data collected for institutional comparisons rather than for purposes other than institutional accountability and improvement will often be examined out of context in the absence of a common vision or management philosophy. Engagement measures are especially vulnerable to misinterpretation since a deep understanding of the local context is essential for creating a suitable panel of measures or indicators as well as for interpreting the results.

According to Kidwell and Long (summarized in Honan 1995), any measurement system must be developed carefully. Some of the factors to take into account in selecting or designing measures are as follows.

1. Build measures on a clear sense of vision and mission and take time to define the qualities you wish to measure and monitor. Tailor the performance indicators to the specific institutional mission, goals and identity of a particular institution and its context.
2. Take time to explore the scope and purpose of the measurements to be undertaken and consider how each audience will want to use the information generated by an assessment system.
3. Make sure that measurement systems link to strategy since "what you measure is what you get." This will be especially difficult in the case of engagement since there is not common agreement on what engagement means,

different motivations for undertaking engagement as a priority, and different approaches to interpreting engagement at a particular institution.

4. Time should be devoted to examining what data are already available and the usefulness of the data, as well as how easily additional data can be collected and interpreted. Creating and maintaining unique measures is labor-intensive and potentially expensive. Indicators do have limitations, and the potential benefit must be balanced against costs. It is possible to measure things that have little relevance to the overall health of an institution or to waste time on measures that cannot be used to guide good decision-making either on the campus or in the community. Measures should focus on core issues.
5. As a new system is put in place, it should be examined regularly to be sure it is accomplishing its intended outcomes and that it is workable.

In the early paragraphs of this paper, diverse interests and motivations for developing measurement strategies were suggested. There are many different uses of performance indicators and assessment strategies, and the data collected for one of these purposes may not serve well to address others: (a) as an accompaniment to self-study and institutional development; (b) as a means to assess institutional performance; (c) as a component of accountability to the public; (d) as a component of quality assurance during institutional accreditation; (e) as a research tool either for institutional research conducted by an institution or for scholarly purposes; and (f) as a component of institutional comparisons and ranking schemes. Though these different purposes may require different types of data and methods, some common approaches to measurement may well serve the current needs for indicators related to engagement.

For example, for all of these different purposes, any system of measures must:

- focus attention of users/readers on core issues
- reinforce common terms and definitions
- be clear, thoughtfully constructed and well-presented
- be grounded in data about results from the perspectives of all users
- be designed to provoke a serious and sustained conversation about improving higher education systems and policies or individual institutional performance (modified from Lingenfelter 2001)

To bring these concepts into a more specific illustration of application that may assist us in considering measures for engagement, consider the case of Virginia. The Measuring Up 2000 project, a state-by-state report card for

higher education which was recently developed by The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, looks at markers for preparation, participation, affordability, completion rates, benefits and learning and gives each state a grade on each dimension. A hallmark of the report card is that it gives a summative score for each factor for all of higher education in each state; any differences among the state's public institutions are not documented. In their reaction to the first version of this report card model, the State Council of Higher Education in Virginia drew on a set of design principles that they developed for their own state measures and that they believe should guide the development of any reports of institutional effectiveness. These principles are completely relevant to the task of incorporating measures of engagement into any of these systems at state or institutional level.

According to Executive Director Phyllis Palmiero of the State Council for Higher Education for Virginia, "accountability works best when it is grounded in the day-to-day work of the institutions we hold accountable." [5] In Virginia, the Council approaches the design of Reports of Institutional Effectiveness by allowing institutions to help define what each should be held accountable for and what standards would be used to measure accountability. The design principles shape a thoughtful and open process that accommodates common interests and priorities, while also capturing evidence of areas of meaningful difference.

- The Council identified a set of performance measures to be used for all institutions, but allowed institutions to identify institution-specific indicators as well.
- Each institution identified appropriate comparators for each performance measure, in accordance with a common, objective and consistent rationale.
- The Council worked with the institutions to determine the best source of data for measures and suitable peer comparison institutions, keeping in mind the need for timeliness, cost-effectiveness and accuracy of the data sources.
- The performance data will be presented by institution and the Council will avoid making comparisons between different institutions with different missions.

As we explore the implications of introducing measures of engagement into either internal or external systems of assessments and performance evaluation, we may be well-served to keep these well-tested principles in mind. These ideas for enhancing the quality, completeness and meaning of measures are also on the minds of those who work with national systems. Representatives from national ranking programs recently affirmed that while the idea of expanding measuring systems to consider "newer" traits

[5] Distributed by SHEEO executive Paul Lingenfelter via e-mail on January 22, 2001.

such as engagement is of potential interest, doing so requires the development of a small set of clear measures that would be understood across all institutions and for which data could be collected objectively and consistently (UUPP, 2000). Alexander McCormick, from his perspective at Carnegie, suggested that one approach might be to create categories and measures to which institutions could respond voluntarily for the purposes of a more thorough description of a mission.

An additional observation on the challenges of measurement, especially the different roles of descriptive and comparative studies, comes from the work of Victor Borden (1999). He highlights the growing distinctiveness of different kinds of institutional missions and the impact this has on strategies for internal assessment and external comparisons. Given more diverse institutional characteristics and strategies, national efforts to promote common and simple measures may continue to be inevitable, but are increasingly unhelpful in helping any institution measure or improve its effectiveness. Borden suggests that the newer and more compelling role for comparative data is to give institutions access to specific information from similar campus contexts and cultures to compare structures, practices and processes. Collecting information in common forms and formats can produce relevant and comparable measures, if the data is drawn from collaborative assessments among institutions with similar traits.

"Comparative institutional data on relevant measures can enrich our understanding of an institution's educational and institutional effectiveness, but are mostly misleading when used to judge effectiveness or efficiency across institutions" (Borden, 1999). This view of the role of comparability means that measurement is less about how an institution measures up against a generic pool of institutions, but more about exploring how it measures up against its own goals and objectives given useful information about the performance of peer institutions. In this approach, comparable data is relevant to the exploration of measuring engagement, given the diversity of campus interests in engagement and their different programmatic objectives for students, campus, and community outcomes. Similarly, descriptive measures are useful in the early stages of program design, experimentation and planning by capturing evidence of good practice and documenting experiences for our own work, as well as potentially for others.

Summary and Other Issues

As illustrated by the Urban University Portfolio Project and similar efforts, the major investment of time and resources required to create measurement strategies are usually meant to serve two broad common purposes: enhancing understanding among internal and external stakeholders, and informing or benchmarking internal planning/evaluation. Each of these purposes calls for different types of measures and associated data, some

oriented to documenting internal conditions and others that offer comparative information for other institutions.

Efforts to measure engagement must recognize that current conceptions and institutional explorations of the potential role of engagement are still in an early stage of development on a national level. In terms of academic maturity, this is a very young institutional reform movement that is still taking shape. There's a lot of work going on, and some patterns are emerging, but there is much work and experimentation yet to accomplish before engagement reaches some later stage of consistency and coherence as an academic activity. How can attention to measurement or description help advance this work at this stage?

At this time, there are strong advocates for the role of engagement in academia who hold different views of its potential: engagement as a strategy for promoting civic and political responsibility in our students, as a pedagogy for improving learning, as a method for expanding applied research productivity, as a strategy for renewing faculty interest in active teaching, as a national strategy for enhancing community capacity and community revitalization, and as an institutional strategy for enhancing image, neighborhood environments of the campus and community relationships. Currently, engagement is perceived by many as an exploratory or transformational endeavor, and the diverse views of engagement's potential seem to be extremely helpful and even essential tools of flexibility that facilitate campus attempts to explore the meaning of engagement in their own internal and community contexts. For example, research suggests that flexibility in the local interpretation of the jargon of engagement (service, outreach, engagement, community partnerships, etc.) is vital to the ability of a campus to initiate new program efforts without triggering resistance generated by unintended verbal meanings.

The important ideas and challenges inherent in the engagement movement also create a sense of urgency and some tension between the call to action and the desire to ensure effectiveness. Our communities and our democratic fabric demand attention. At the same time, institutions must take the time to responsibly and appropriately explore the new programmatic, organizational, financial, and cultural issues that are raised by the new work of engagement. This tension has, so far, seemed to be constructive given both the speed and creativity evident in the expanding national discussion of and experimentation with the role of engagement.

This kind of flexibility, experimentation and openness to innovation is essential during exploratory phases of change, if we are to ensure the sustainability of engagement as a component of academic work. This does not mean measurement or description is futile at this point. To the contrary, it is an essential and timely activity.

A good question to focus on may be: what kinds of descriptors or indicators will help the most institutions at this point in their evolving effort to implement and expand academic involvement in engagement endeavors? We already see, through the various examples of multi-institutional projects and studies, considerable interest in learning from each other, capturing lessons learned and disseminating good ideas through publications and conferences. Next stage or national-scale efforts to explore measures can begin to articulate and document key cross-cutting themes by, in part, focusing on the most elemental factors essential to all these different views of engagement - the features and challenges most common to institutions working with engagement strategies, and the characteristics essential to effective partnerships. Expanded efforts, building on work-to-date, to develop descriptors and indicators of engagement will advance our understanding and accelerate the evolution of a more comprehensive and general view of the overall role of engagement – much as we have only recently developed more of an industry-wide capacity to talk more generally and comprehensively about general issues of teaching and learning (though work much remains to be done in that arena as well).

This approach suggests an immediate emphasis on strategies for documentation and measures that are descriptive and diagnostic more than comparative. Descriptive indicators focus on capturing practical and useful information that can inform the work of others, identify key issues, and legitimize engagement efforts in ways that respect the current diversity of interests, contexts and motivations. In addition, a focus on detailed, objective, and consistent approaches to descriptive indicators lays the essential groundwork for more analytical work. For example, though flexibility in language has been helpful in these early stages, precise measurement of performance and effectiveness will make little sense without some concurrence on common terms of art (Wellman, 1999). But working on definitions in and of themselves is often fruitless, frustrating work. By first developing ways to more consistently and specifically describe the work, techniques, forms, processes and purposes of engagement, new and more specific terms and indicators essential to advanced measurement of outcomes and quality will emerge.

In addition, measurement strategies should reflect the values inherent in the work of engagement and the partnership relationships that sustain that work. How will community perspectives be integrated into the design and implementation of measurement or documentation strategies, and in the analysis of data? Civic action – for individuals and institutions – is a risk-taking behavior. To the extent that we believe the civic mission of higher education is centered in the principles and values of a democratic society such as justice, honesty, equity, participation, freedom of access to information, and others, then any system of measurement must also project and model those traits.

Creating indicators that document current practices in ways that model these values and more clearly link democratic action to the intellectual business of colleges and universities may serve to accelerate the expansion and sustainability of engagement, to the benefit of more institutions and communities.

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Appendices

Appendix A: The Holland Matrix and the assessment of level of campus commitment materials prepared at IUPUI to accompany the use of the matrix.

Appendix B: The IUPUI Comprehensive Action Plan for Service Learning (CAPSL) Tables 1-5 from Bringle and Hatcher (1996)