Institutionalizing Campus-Community Engagement: Reflections on the University as Citizen Conference

By James C. Cavendish

On February 21-24, 2001, the University of South Florida hosted an international conference, "University as Citizen: Engaging Universities and Communities," centered on the theme of how colleges and universities can establish the kinds of programs and policies necessary to foster university-community engagement—what specialists in the field refer to as *institutionalization*. This issue of *Metropolitan Universities* features papers originally presented at that conference. As the articles in this issue illustrate, institutionalizing university-community engagement reaches across the various dimensions of college/university life, and takes different shapes in different institutional contexts. In terms of how it affects university life, institutionalization entails not only redefining scholarship and university culture in ways that promote engagement, but also modifying curricula, providing training for faculty and staff, and developing university infrastructure and systems of accountability that sustain university-community engagement once it has begun. While institutionalization can influence all of these dimensions of university life, it is important to keep in mind that institutionalization will look very different across varying organizational contexts. No two institutions will be alike. Private liberal arts colleges will often adopt different strategies of, and derive different benefits from, institutionalization than public universities. And the same can be said of institutions of varying histories, sizes, and locales.

It is hoped that by sharing these, and numerous other, insights generated from the University as Citizen Conference, and presenting them here in a single issue of *Metropolitan Universities*, the University of South Florida and the participants in the conference can serve as catalysts for a broader, more pervasive movement of engagement across universities and communities. In this day and age, colleges and universities must demonstrate the ways they form partnerships with, and provide benefits to, their communities. Such partnerships can only be sustained if institutions of higher education adopt institutional strategies to foster engagement. In light of this fact, I invite you, when reading these articles, to reflect on how your own institution, be it a college or a university, might better institutionalize its own commitment to engagement and thereby reinforce your community's appreciation of the services your institution provides.

In this introductory article, I set out to accomplish three principal objectives. First, I want to provide readers with a brief history of the University of South Florida's planning of the "University as Citizen" conference. Why did the university want to host

such a conference, and how did the conference planners decide on the theme of institutionalization? Second, I want to describe what the process of institutionalization has come to entail in the various colleges and universities that have adopted engagement as part of their missions. What does the *institutionalization* of engagement really mean, and how do we evaluate whether a particular organization has sufficiently or successfully institutionalized engagement? Finally, I want to describe the layout of this issue of *Metropolitan Universities* and present the common themes that have emerged from the analyses offered by our contributors.

The Planning of the Conference

In the summer of 1998, the University of South Florida (USF) created the Provost's Strategic and Planning Task Force on Community and Urban Initiatives whose charge was to envision ways in which the university could significantly enhance its commitment to community engagement. One of the recommendations presented in the Task Force's final report was for the university to host a conference that would "highlight its current community involvement and bring together experts in the field."

The reasons behind this recommendation were two-fold. First and foremost, the Task Force recognized that hosting a conference on university-community engagement could stimulate dialogue on engagement efforts already underway at USF and other universities. By learning what other universities were doing, and sharing USF's own experiences and challenges, the Task Force believed USF could simultaneously learn how to further institutionalize its own commitment to engagement, as well as serve as a catalyst for a broader movement. Secondly, and perhaps more to the heart of this volume, the Task Force perceived that by convening scholars and practitioners who have studied and implemented programs and practices of engagement, it could contribute to a growing discussion and literature on engagement. Because there was already an ample literature on the various models of university-community engagement, but very little on the specific topic of how such engagement is institutionalized, members of the Task Force believed the conference could address how colleges and universities actually initiate and maintain institutional change, and in so doing, make a significant contribution to the extant literature.

In the summer of 1999, the university established two committees to oversee the planning of the conference—the Conference Planning Committee, under the leadership of Mark Amen and Laura Ellenburg, and the Program Subcommittee, co-chaired by Robin Jones and Barbara Morrison-Rodriguez. Taking their lead from Barbara Holland's (1997) seminal article on institutionalization, the Program Subcommittee set out to form a list of elements of engaged universities that could serve as themes for the conference. Through extensive discussion, the committee arrived at six areas of college/university life that any organization seeking to be engaged must address—infrastructure and culture, curricula, redefining scholarship, knowledge hub, university as citizen, and funding and accountability. These areas would serve as themes of concurrent sessions/symposia of the conference.

In order to include the local community in the planning of the conference, conference planners also held a community forum on November 2, 1999, to solicit information on what community representatives perceived as challenges and obstacles to university-community collaboration in addressing community issues. This was followed by two additional pre-conference community events: on February 24, 2000, community representatives were invited to respond to a presentation by Dr. James Moore, Director of the School of Architecture and Community Design, on "Urban Sprawl in the Tampa Bay Area: Issues and Options;" and on November 29, 2000, the community was invited to dialogue with USF professors who were conducting research, in collaboration with community partners, as part of the University Community Initiative's grant program. The information gathered from these events was integrated into the planning of the conference, and community representatives were invited to share their experiences and insights by participating in the conference itself.

During this time, the Conference Planning Committee also began to talk about the various universities that seemed to exhibit broad institutional changes supporting engagement, and Robin Jones circulated a "trip report" based on her visits to some of the leading universities in this area, including Portland State University, University of Illinois at Chicago, and the University of Pennsylvania. Because some committee members were also aware of universities outside the U.S. making similar strides in engagement, the planners broadened the conference's scope to include international universities. In the end, the planners conceived of the conference as an international conference composed of both concurrent sessions, in which participants would explore the implications of their programs on institutional change, as well as featured university sessions, in which various institutions that had achieved change across units would present their histories.

Within a short time, a Call for Presentations was distributed, and as presentation proposals came in, a review committee was set up to sift through the proposals, decide on acceptance/rejection, and assign the proposals to sessions that seemed to hang together. The result was a conference program consisting of a variety of concurrent sessions devoted to the six conference themes and featured university sessions describing the history of engagement at six prominent universities: Portland State University, University of Pennsylvania, University of Illinois at Chicago, University of California at San Diego, University of the Free State in Blomfontein, South Africa, and Universidad de las Americas in Pueblo, Mexico. Holland's contribution to this issue, which is based on her presentation at the conference, discusses the themes that weave throughout the stories shared by these six universities.

The collection of articles in this issue, therefore, is the product of an extensive process of review, presentation, discussion, and revision. Each article has benefited from public presentation and discussion as well as editorial review. Although all conference participants were invited to submit papers for possible inclusion in this issue, the sheer volume of submissions required the review committee to be selective, and in the end, we chose articles that illustrated how institutionalizing university-community engage-

ment can reach across the various dimensions of university life and take different shapes in different institutional contexts. They ask questions such as: How do we go about rewarding scholarship that has direct applications in the community? How do we promote values of citizenship through the university curriculum, whether it be through developing service-learning courses or offering engaged internship programs? And, perhaps most importantly, if the engagement model is to be adopted by more colleges and universities, how can we effectively assess engaged scholarship and curricula in ways that demonstrate their effectiveness for both universities and communities?

The real appeal of these articles, however, goes beyond these questions. While these questions are themselves important, the articles do an excellent job of asking them in ways that are sensitive to a variety of institutional contexts. The three articles by Bird and Stamps, Letvan et al., and Mitchell and Levine, for instance, give us a glimpse of how the process of institutionalization has occurred—and is occurring—in three very different types of institutions of higher education: a large metropolitan public university, a small regional public university, and a small, private liberal arts college located in a small industrial town. Examining how institutionalization occurs in each of these settings is important because, as Zlotkowski (1998) has observed, institutionalization is a process that varies across institutional types, with metropolitan universities, community colleges, faith-based institutions, historically black colleges, and private liberal arts colleges taking different approaches to civic engagement. For this reason, it is no surprise that Bringle et al., in their article on planning and assessing campus-community engagement, find that no one model will suffice in documenting and assessing civic engagement. Rather, each institution must evaluate its civic engagement "in relation to their own unique sets of circumstances," as these circumstances will dictate the path of institutionalization.

Although it is true that institutionalization is a process that will look different from one organization to the next, there are some common features of institutionalization that pertain to any college or university. It is helpful to understand these common features before discussing the divergent paths undertaken by different institutions.

What Does Institutionalization of Campus-Community Engagement Commonly Entail?

In order for any college or university to develop a sustained program of engagement, it must move beyond simple sponsorship of service-related activities and begin to reflect carefully not only on the meaning of these activities for the institution but also on how it can develop a culture and infrastructure to maintain them. One key step in this process involves a focus on the mission of the college or university. As Holland (1997) has observed, "Whether a campus engages in service on a small or large scale, commitment to any level of service requires institutions to make choices.... Each institution must develop its own understanding of the degree to which service is an integral component of the academic mission." Once this step is complete, the organization can

begin to plan how it intends to accomplish that mission. If the organization is to be successful, this will necessarily entail articulating clearly defined goals for engagement, developing a culture and infrastructure that support and sustain its pursuit of those goals, and initiating a system of accountability to monitor progress at all levels within the organization toward achieving those goals. In other words, commitment to community engagement influences a variety of dimensions of the organization, including institutional missions, policies, structures, decisions, and resources. It also has an effect on how the institution defines good scholarship, how it assesses effective teaching, and how it evaluates professional service. In the concrete, institutionalization can include such things as developing new course offerings, establishing campus units to focus on service-learning, developing interdisciplinary programs and certificates, as well as redefining criteria for promotion, tenure, and hiring.

As we shall see in many of the articles presented in this volume, an institution's success in developing a sustained program of engagement is dependent on how well it achieves consistency and congruence among these various organizational factors. As Holland (1997) accurately observed through her own research, "…institutionalization of the role of service is greatest when an institution operates uniformly on one level."

Layout of the Issue

This issue of *Metropolitan Universities* begins with an essay that Judith Ramaley, former President of the University of Vermont, originally presented as a keynote address at the University as Citizen conference. This essay is a fitting opening to the volume because, by reminding us of the reasons we engage in engagement, it sets the tone for the discussion of institutionalization. As with any project on which we embark, it is important to reflect on the factors that motivate us in our pursuit. Such is the case with Ramaley's article, which does a splendid job of describing our motivations. After describing the various factors that motivate our pursuit of engagement, Ramaley spells out the challenges that await those who have picked up the banner of engagement. These challenges stem largely from disagreements in the academic community about the merits of community engagement. In the end, however, Ramaley argues that the efforts we expend in meeting these challenges will be well worth it. Not only will our communities reap the benefits of our efforts of engagement, but so too will our students.

Barbara Holland then turns our attention to the successes and challenges experienced by some of the chief models of engagement, including Portland State University, University of Pennsylvania, University of Illinois at Chicago, University of California at San Diego, University of Free State (Blomfontein, South Africa), and Universidad de las Americas (Pueblo, Mexico). These successes and challenges become quite vivid as Holland artfully discusses the themes that weave throughout the stories shared by these universities in their presentations at the University as Citizen Conference.

Holland's work is followed by Theodore Alter and Patricia Book's article, which presents a nice summary of the dynamics by which institutionalization is happening at Penn State University. Penn State provides an important example of how land-grant

universities are "returning to their roots" of meeting the economic development needs of their communities. The authors, by outlining the principles that guided their process of institutionalization, reveal how the university moved through the process of organizational change by first focusing on individual change. Penn State did more than just develop a vision or mission of engagement, it developed a vision of how to move through the process of institutionalization itself. It began by understanding that organizational change depends on making sure the individuals who are a part of the organization understand the meaning of the changes in light of the university's mission. Organizational change was possible at Penn State, the authors argue, by first ensuring that the individuals connected "personally and emotionally with the rationale and purpose of the changes." This necessarily entails bringing faculty, staff, and administrators on board by first educating them about the outreach initiatives, but then by creating incentives and rewards for the work of engagement. According to the authors, at the core of the university's efforts at engagement "is the ongoing commitment of faculty to participate in outreach activities." The university's Faculty Senate, a faculty learning community, and senior faculty leaders have broadened the organization's advancement of outreach by defining outreach as integral to each of the three dimensions of scholarship—research, teaching, and service.

Like Alter and Book, Earle Klay, R.S. Brower, and Brian Williams argue that the process of insitutionalization in colleges and universities must begin by first establishing the perception among academicians themselves of the need for change. A key component in this institutionalization, for these authors, is the creation of what they call "a community-oriented model of academic professionalism," which unlike the prevailing model, brings together professionals from universities and communities and "opens university research to the wisdom that resides in persons beyond university campuses." In order for this model to be respected—and ultimately adopted—Klay et al. argue that the model must employ sound research. "It should," they argue, "seek to tap the wisdom that exists in communities in ways that are rigorous and defensible to criticism." At the same time, it should challenge universities to address the paradigmatic clash over research methodologies that currently characterizes the academy.

The three articles by Bird and Stamps; Letvan, Ostheimer, and Statham; and Mitchell and Levine give us a glimpse of how the process of institutionalization occurred in three different types of institutions of higher education: a large metropolitan public university, a small regional public university, and a small, private liberal arts college located in a small industrial town. At the University of South Florida, a large metropolitan university within the Florida State University System, the process of institutionalization, while prefigured in its founding mission statement, began at the grassroots level. At the University of Wisconsin-Parkside, a small public regional comprehensive university, insitutionalization of university-community engagement began as a way for the university to establish a clear image of community connection in response to state-mandated cutbacks and an enrollment downturn. Finally, at Albion College, a small, religiously affiliated liberal arts college, institutionalization began when the college's administration initiated an envisioning process that ultimately expanded campus-

community connections among students, faculty, and staff. What is interesting about this case, and perhaps something that sets it apart from other cases, is that the college's envisioning process served as a catalyst for a similar envisioning process by the city of Albion itself. This collaboration between the college and the city in envisioning partnerships is perhaps especially important for small liberal arts colleges, as many of these colleges attract student bodies that are wealthier and more suburban than the populations surrounding them.

Once readers have had an opportunity to reflect on how institutionalization is happening in various institutional contexts, they will be anxious to see how universities and colleges can actually assess their experience of engagement. Commonly, when we think of assessing engagement we think of some type of individual assessment, like when a particular instructor's service-learning course is evaluated for its effectiveness. In the final article of this issue, Robert Bringle, Julie Hatcher, Sharon Hamilton, and Peter Young provide some models of assessment that can be used to evaluate the *institution's* commitment to, and success with, engagement. This is critically important because although "many universities are accustomed to defining and describing civic engagement… very few have systematically developed measurable outcomes in relation to the impact of civic engagement on the quality of campus and community life."

As the authors correctly point out, community engagement cannot be assessed solely by measuring or tabulating the number of campus-community projects. Rather, community engagement is only properly evaluated in terms of the *quality* of campus-community partnerships, as well as the actual outcomes or transformations that result from the work of engagement. In this article, Bringle et al. present two structured assessment methods that university administrators may wish to use to evaluate their campus' success with engagement. According to these authors, at the heart of a fully engaged college or university is an effective service-learning program, because once service learning has been institutionalized, "it is part of the academic culture of the institution." But service learning by itself is not sufficient; it should be viewed as a "stepping stone" in a development of a full-fledged civic agenda.

Common Themes

A number of themes emerge about the process of institutionalization from the articles contained in this volume. First and foremost, we cannot expect the process of institutionalization to follow a uniform, linear path beginning at one level of the institution and spreading to the others. At some places, like University of Wisconsin-Parkside and Albion College, the process of institutionalization begins at the highest levels of the administration, which in striving to define the university's mission, make a direct commitment to community engagement. At other institutions, like the University of South Florida, however, the process may have its inspiration in the institution's founding mission, but it has relied on actions at the grassroots to get the process moving. In other words, the process of institutionalization of engagement is neither a uniform top-down nor bottom-up transformation. It may start and stop at different moments in the institution's history, and different actors at various levels within the institution may

provide the yeast to get the process moving.

A second theme to emerge from these articles is that the process of institutionalization does not happen in a vacuum. This is not a new theme in the literature on engagement. As Barbara Holland noted just a few years back, it is important to recognize that the process of institutionalization is influenced by the presence of a variety of key environmental forces. Holland (1997) states that "the factors that seem most likely to be associated with movement across levels (of institutionalization) include unit and campus leadership; financial resources including internal allocations, external funding and incentives; internal and external expectations and demands (governing bodies, legislatures, community interest groups, local crises); community history and goals; and institutional motivations…."

As you will see from the articles in this issue, therefore, the universities and colleges described herein have followed different paths in the process of institutionalization and did so mainly as a result of various environmental forces. Ultimately, however, their success is achieved in very similar ways—and only when engagement is believed in as deeply "by the followers as by the leaders." Effective institutionalization, these articles demonstrate, cannot be achieved solely through top-down policies of administrators. Faculty, staff, and students must all experience an ownership in the process. Nor can institutionalization be achieved solely through a bottom-up movement. Faculty, staff, and students must receive the support of their highest administrators if their movement is to be successful.

References

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