

Overview of the Indicators of Engagement Project (IOEP)

Edward Zlotkowski and Jennifer Meeropol, Guest Editors

Colleges are eager for reliable information about how to become an engaged campus. This becomes unmistakably clear each year in Campus Compact's* annual member survey. In 2003, for example, respondents identified the Compact's most valuable services as providing resource materials (97%) and identifying model programs (93%). Furthermore, national leaders have repeatedly called upon Campus Compact to provide more information on campus engagement practices because they regard such information as essential in advancing national policy.

The indicators of engagement on which this issue of *Metropolitan Universities* is based were developed by the Compact's executive director Elizabeth Hollander, former Integrating Service with Academic Study project director John Saltmarsh, and senior faculty fellow Edward Zlotkowski (Hollander and Saltmarsh, 2000; Hollander, Saltmarsh, and Zlotkowski, 2002) to capture the various approaches to community and civic engagement they observed at institutions across the country. They formulated the indicators to help campuses, first, assess their current level of engagement and, second, identify strategies to deepen their work. In developing the indicators, Hollander, Saltmarsh, and Zlotkowski used a broad range of criteria, recognizing that institutions approach engagement in ways best suited to their particular culture and priorities. Furthermore, they recognized that it was unlikely that any one campus, however engaged, would exhibit all of the indicators to an equal extent. Hence, the indicators were intended to be used selectively—not as imperatives but as a heuristic to identify new possibilities. The 13 indicators were described as follows:

1. Mission and purpose explicitly articulate a commitment to the public purposes of higher education.
2. Administrative and academic leadership (president, trustees, provost) is in the forefront of institutional transformation that supports civic engagement.
3. Disciplines, departments, and interdisciplinary work have incorporated community-based education, allowing it to penetrate across disciplines and reach the institution's academic core.
4. Teaching and learning incorporate a community-based, public problem-solving approach.
5. Faculty development opportunities are available for faculty to retool their teaching and redesign their curricula to incorporate community-based activities and reflection on those activities within the context of the course.

6. Faculty roles and rewards, including promotion and tenure guidelines and review, reflect a reconsideration of scholarship that embraces a scholarship of engagement.
7. Support structures and resources are present in the form of visible and easily accessible structures (e.g., centers, offices) on campus to assist faculty with community-based teaching and to broker community partnerships.
8. Internal budget and resource allocation is adequate for establishing, enhancing, and deepening community-based work on campus—for faculty, students, and programs that involve community partners.
9. Community voice deepens the role of community partners in contributing to community-based education and shaping outcomes that benefit the community.
10. External resource allocations are made available for community partners to create richer learning environments for students and for community-building efforts in local neighborhoods.
11. Coordination of community-based activities is a priority, with structures to weave together student service, service-learning, and other community engagement activities on campus.
12. Forums for fostering public dialogue are created that include multiple stakeholders in public problem-solving.
13. Student voice is cultivated in a way that recognizes students as key partners in their own education and civic development and supports their efforts to act on issues important to themselves and their peers.

Whatever the value of the indicators as a broad map of institutional engagement, Campus Compact quickly recognized that there were several barriers to their effective utilization. For example, the tremendous diversity of American colleges and universities makes it difficult to generalize about specific practices across institutional sectors. But even in the context of a single campus, capturing all relevant practices and determining whether, in fact, they should be regarded as “model” approaches requires a serious investment of time and energy. Indeed, even when appropriate models have been found, one must still meet the challenge of documenting them with sufficient specificity to make them useful to others.

Over the years, Campus Compact has experimented with a number of ways to develop model programs/model practices information, including self-reports, small grants to campuses to facilitate documentation efforts, and specific self-evaluation grants made available through state Campus Compact offices. Each strategy has produced some useful information, but none has been organized in such a way that it also can effect significant change.

Then, in May 2002, the Compact received a three-year grant from the Carnegie Foundation of New York to combine documentation and dissemination of best practices of civic engagement in and through the indicators. In developing this project, the Compact decided to take explicitly into account the importance of institutional types and comparison groups, and thus to make the applicability of whatever models were identified as probable as possible.

With this goal in mind, Compact staff designed each year of the grant to focus on a different institutional type: community colleges in year one, minority-serving institutions (including historically Black colleges and universities, Tribal colleges and universities, and Hispanic-serving institutions) in year two, and comprehensive institutions in year three. In all three cases, the project has sought to capture the diversity *within* each institutional type by working with a range of schools based on geography, setting (e.g., urban, rural, suburban), size, and other characteristics. The reason the Compact chose to focus on community colleges in year one and minority-serving institutions in year two was that the characteristics that define such schools challenge us to ask whether units of analysis derived largely from experiences with traditional 4-year schools work in the same way when applied to institutions underrepresented in much of the engagement literature.

Comprehensive Universities

Given the focus of the project's first two years, the decision to focus on comprehensive universities in year three cannot help but strike one as puzzling. Indeed, had the Compact had sufficient funding, it had hoped to move from community colleges and minority-serving institutions to faith-based institutions, liberal arts colleges, and research intensive universities—before concluding with comprehensive universities. Once it became clear that funding for such a sequence was not available, it was decided that the project needed to include those very schools from which much of the evidence for the thirteen indicators of engagement was originally derived.

Indeed, one would be hard pressed to find another educational sector that has exercised as much leadership vis-à-vis engagement as have the schools in this sector. By the early 1990s, a number of comprehensive universities had already identified the “scholarship of engagement” as an institutional priority and the “engaged” campus as an institutional goal. Some of those schools are represented in this volume. Throughout the decade of the 1990s, the number of comprehensives making community and/or civic engagement an explicit part of their strategic plans continued to grow. By 2003, campus interest was sufficient to allow the sector's national organization—the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU)—to launch a major initiative called the “American Democracy Project” (ADP). Its mission would be to create an intellectual and experiential understanding of civic engagement for undergraduates enrolled at institutions that are members of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities.... The goal of the project is to produce graduates who understand and are committed to engaging in meaningful actions as citizens in a democracy (www.aascu.org/programs/adp/about).

Although the ADP's plan for achieving civic engagement embraces a wider set of strategies than are covered by the indicators of engagement, the project clearly recognizes service-learning and the kinds of initiatives documented by the indicators as of critical significance in achieving its stated outcome. By the end of 2005, over 200 AASCU institutions had signed on to the undertaking.

Lessons Learned

Given the fact that many of the insights that led to formulation of the thirteen indicators were themselves the result of experiences at comprehensive universities, it is not at all surprising that the practices documented in this volume do not so much stretch as centrally illuminate what the indicators were meant to identify. Thus, the kinds of special "lessons" learned in year one's work with community colleges and year two's work with minority-serving institutions are far less in evidence. Nevertheless, we still can identify some sector-specific features that deserve special emphasis.

1. Centers play a critical role in facilitating and coordinating multiple approaches to engagement and fostering a climate of engagement on campus. This may, at first, seem self-evident, but our work with minority-serving institutions suggested that formal infrastructure is not always necessary to mount a coherent, comprehensive, effective engagement effort. When schools are sufficiently small and their culture is already saturated with engagement as a primary institutional value, it becomes possible to bypass the role of formal mechanisms in sustaining a commitment to engagement. However, in the case of relatively large majority-white or ethnically fluid institutions, structures and resources must "compensate" for what shared values and traditions cannot by themselves sustain. It is interesting that the vast majority of schools represented in this volume could have modeled at least some of the practices we bundle under the rubric "mechanisms and resources"—even when they chose another focus.
2. Institutional commitment to a well-articulated, well-defined "scholarship of engagement" is an especially critical component of engaging faculty at comprehensive institutions. Since such institutions typically stress the importance of teaching as well as their service to the state and the region—but do not thereby deny the importance of scholarly activities such as presentations—and publications, engagement needs to be tied to scholarship as well as teaching and service. Indeed, faculty teaching loads do not permit the luxury of placing teaching and scholarship in separate, air-tight compartments. Unless engagement activities are formally described and recognized as one possibility of demonstrating genuine academic excellence—excellence that is peer-reviewed and peer-respected—it will be difficult to avoid a potentially destructive conflict between those who wish to see the institution value above all else scholarship in the traditional sense (often a symptom of "mission creep") and those who see teaching as a kind of absolution from scholarship. It is, for this reason, very significant that some of the most effective and comprehensive attempts to transform *faculty culture* have taken place at comprehensive universities.

3. Because comprehensive universities often boast a broad range of academic programs, but are not so large that academic units become institutions unto themselves, their engagement efforts demonstrate a special potential. Those efforts can demonstrate a wealth and variety of resources that would not be possible at, say, a liberal arts college, but also an institutional coherence that would be hard to achieve at many research intensive universities. This configuration of factors adds significantly to comprehensive universities' ability to model partnerships that effect significant and sustainable social change. Indeed, complex partnerships that involve many different players in both the university and the community are explored in several of the preceding essays.
4. Since most comprehensive universities feature an unusually diverse mix of students—i.e., diversity in terms of age, socio-economic background and student status as well as race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation—they can serve as sites for developing civic literacy in an especially important and representative way. To be sure, such multi-faceted diversity also presents many significant challenges to effective civic education. Still, as the four-year institutions that typically serve the largest number of “local” students, their engagement efforts not only contribute significantly to the intellectual resources available for community problem-solving but also significantly increase the probability that local communities will be populated by individuals prepared to participate in a diverse democracy.
5. Closely related to lesson #4 is the fact that comprehensive universities, like their community college counterparts, are far more willing than elite institutions to see themselves as *of* and not just *in* the communities that surround them. Although all colleges and universities, given the various kinds of public support and legal privileges they enjoy, can and should see themselves as genuine “stewards of place” (AASCU 2002), comprehensive universities have a special opportunity to mold their programs to the specific needs of their locale. Whether these needs take primarily an economic, demographic, or environmental form, comprehensive universities can serve as organizers, facilitators, and enablers in a way few other institutions can. Perhaps one of the most striking examples of a school that exemplifies what it means to develop fully a sense of one’s “place” is the school that contributed the introduction to this issue. Even more than many other comprehensive universities, the University of Texas, El Paso has explicitly built into its claim to excellence not just its location in the Southwest but its close proximity to the Mexican border. Far from being merely an “external” circumstance, that proximity has been embraced as a defining opportunity for leadership and innovation.

The Process of Creating This Issue

In closing, we wish to describe briefly the process that led to the selection of the essays that appear in this issue and to acknowledge the special assistance we received in making that selection.

As was also the case in our work with community colleges and minority-serving institutions, the selection process began with an open call for proposals (August 2004). Twenty-two letters of intent were received by a November deadline; 15 abstracts were received in December, and they were then reviewed by a committee that selected nine essays for inclusion. In this way, we tried to make the selection process as open and as objective as possible. Unfortunately, one liability of such an open procedure was that we were unable even to consider excellent programs that failed to submit either a letter of intent or an abstract. Indeed, because the field of engaged comprehensive universities is so extensive, we knew from the start that we would not be able to include in the issue many schools that fully deserve to be included. Complicating the selection process still further was the fact that collectively the schools included would have to cover all the indicator groupings if not each of the individual indicators. Hence, our ability to showcase excellence in any one area was seriously limited.

To our review committee belongs the last word. Without its generous contribution of time and energy, we would not have been able to move forward as well as we did. Our deepest thanks to: Nancy Andes, Professor, University of Alaska, Anchorage; Cathy Ludlum Foes, Professor, Indiana University East; Sherril Gelmon, Professor, Portland State University; John Hamerlinck, Community Partnership Director, Minnesota Campus Compact; Steve Jones, Service-Learning Coordinator, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI); Jacquelyn McCracken, Executive Director, Indiana Campus Compact; Sherita Moses, YES Ambassador on the Raise Your Voice student engagement project, Campus Compact; Maureen Rubin, Service-Learning Director, California State University Northridge; and Betty Siegal, President, Kennesaw State University

*In 1985, the presidents of Brown, Georgetown, and Stanford Universities, along with the president of the Education Commission of the States, joined together to form Campus Compact, a coalition of college and university presidents committed to fulfilling the civic purposes of higher education. As the only national higher education association dedicated solely to campus-based civic engagement, Campus Compact promotes public and community service that develops students' citizenship skills, helps campuses forge effective community partnerships, and provides resources and training for faculty seeking to integrate civic and community-based learning into the curriculum. Member presidents believe that by creating a supportive campus environment for engagement in community service, colleges and universities can best prepare their students to be active, committed, and informed citizens and community leaders.

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