

Reflections on Campus Engagement: The Value of Vision, Setting, and Talent

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Abstract

This essay describes the mechanisms and resources necessary to ensure effective engagement in higher education. Entering a second decade of service, our goal is to move beyond defining goals and strategies, and focus upon solidifying the institutional structures and resources needed to sustain our commitment to serving the needs of Baltimore. The Internal Resources Allocation and Enabling Mechanisms Indicators, identified by Campus Compact, serve as a framework for efforts to institutionalize engagement on our campus. The value of the internal resources allocation and enabling mechanisms indicators to the creation and success of The Shriver Center are evident. The resources committed to the Center by UMBC secure its place as part of the core mission of the university.

“What is going to change the world today is the same thing that has changed it in the past: an idea, and the service of dedicated individuals committed to that idea.”

Sargent Shriver

“People who make a difference are those who have caring values and act upon them, who have a vision and believe it can come true...who, through service to others and to our best selves, can change a community or a country into a caring, free society.”

Eunice Kennedy Shriver

“Our universities and colleges remain, in my opinion, one of the greatest hopes for intellectual and civic progress in this country.”

Ernest Boyer

Having begun a second decade at The Shriver Center, we reflect in this essay on our founding ideals and distill several lessons learned from our first ten years. As Dewey and his modern interpreters (e.g., Donald Schoen) have taught us, reflection is central, not peripheral, to the learning process. Beyond our pursuit of reflexive learning, our hope is that these lessons are sufficiently general to be instructive or useful. Campus Compact’s *Indicators of Engagement Project* and the 13 indicators this initiative has identified as crucial to achieving a culture of engagement at higher education institutions serve as the backdrop for this essay. Specifically, this reflection will focus on the Mechanisms and Resources indicators, the concrete and specific resources the university commits to civic engagement.

The University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC) established The Shriver Center on December 14, 1993, in honor of Eunice Kennedy Shriver and Sargent Shriver. UMBC, a mid-sized, public research institution located outside of Baltimore, Maryland, was identified nearly ten years ago by Yarmolinsky and Martello (1996) as “metropolitan in the most meaningful sense” because of its significant contributions to the Baltimore community through service delivery and service-learning (Yarmolinsky and Martello 1996). Nearly ten years ago, two articles in this journal attempted to define the early stages of the efforts of The Shriver Center to engage UMBC in service to its metropolitan community. Entering a second decade of service, our goal is to move beyond defining goals and strategies and focus upon solidifying the institutional structures and resources needed to sustain our commitment to serving the needs of Baltimore.

Successful engagement requires a multifaceted approach. As we reflect on the story of The Shriver Center’s founding and development, we believe three complementary and integrated components have underpinned our early success: *vision*, *setting*, and *talent*. Each depends upon a variety of mechanisms and resources that collectively provide a framework for sustained campus engagement. The internal resources allocation indicator is best showcased through the talent that the Center has drawn to and supported at UMBC. The enabling mechanisms indicator is framed in this essay by the multiple settings through which our work takes place.

Vision: Standing on the Shoulders of Giants

The creation of The Shriver Center was actually the result of the marriage of two visions: first, a vision of a world made better through citizen service, and second, a vision of higher education made broadly relevant again through its engagement of real social problems. The first vision was inspired by our founders, Sargent and Eunice Kennedy Shriver. The Shrivens’ visionary idea, which they have inspirationally embodied, is captured in the term *practical idealism*. Utopian visions have little value without accompanying rounds of public discourse, negotiation, planning and implementation. The Shriver Center’s questions have been: What do real and diverse people have to say about this vision? What dialogues will constitute the process of negotiating a consensual and useful version of this vision? What programs and strategies will motor the engines of progressive change?

We now turn to the second vision. When the idea arose for a higher education center that would reflect this Shriver spirit of practical idealism, the Shrivens called upon Ernest Boyer. Boyer, a former SUNY Chancellor, U.S. Commissioner of Education, and longtime President of The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, had for decades been leading the effort to create a new vision of American higher education reform. He saw in The Shriver Center proposal a prototype for what he had begun to describe as “The New American College,” a setting where theory and practice were connected in a common mission to serve society through the *scholarship of engagement*. This was the Shrivens’ practical idealism applied to the academy.

Boyer researched the history of American higher education, noting its shifts from the early colonial model focused on small teaching settings, to the applied public service visions epitomized in the land grant colleges of the late 19th century, to the currently dominant research model focused on the scholarship of discovery (first embodied at Johns Hopkins in our own Baltimore). Boyer's vision of engaged scholarship was to draw upon the best of these various traditions and restore balance to the academy by engaging all university stakeholders - faculty, students, staff and administrators—in a common mission to serve the public good. Engaged Scholarship integrated the scholarship of discovery (i.e., pure research), the scholarship of integration (i.e., framing knowledge broadly across disciplines), the scholarship of teaching (i.e., transmitting knowledge), and the scholarship of application (i.e., putting knowledge to concrete and eminent uses) as integrated components constituting the larger mission of higher education. In practice, this meant taking the notion of service, once at the forefront of land grant institutions, and restoring its vitality and urgency.

However, the question of what overarching issues required engagement remained. If feeding a growing nation and providing a skilled workforce for an industrial economy had defined the mission for land grant colleges a century before, what was the similarly broad and visionary charge of the engaged academy at the end of the 20th century? Informed by the visions of practical idealism and engaged scholarship described above, The Shriver Center was created to answer this final question by shifting from theory to practice in addressing the urgent social problems of the American City. Thus, our mission has been to harness the talents and resources of higher education to attack and solve the challenges and needs of metropolitan Baltimore. Our wide range of campus initiatives—graduate and undergraduate service-learning programs, internships and other experiential and applied learning opportunities, and community-based service delivery programs—flow from this vision of practical idealism and engaged scholarship set in a metropolitan landscape.

Setting: Making Physical, Political, and Ideational Place for Service

Creation of and support for a high profile, prominently-located center for engagement probably represents the most visible evidence of a university's commitment to engagement through internal resource allocation and enabling mechanisms. Indeed, a 1999 RAND study of Learn and Serve America Higher Education programs pointed to the special importance of a distinct service center, a place, or "single location" to provide high quality and sustainable programs (Gray, Ondaatje, and Zakaras 1999). Through the work of The Shriver Center, UMBC has become a national leader in promoting service-learning, civic engagement and community-based service delivery. The Shriver Center enables students to link academic study to professional practice and community service and is UMBC's primary vehicle for producing socially-engaged citizens who graduate with the commitment and experience to serve responsibly in their communities, the state and the nation. The Shriver Center also develops programs designed to strengthen communities and build local capacity to deal

effectively with pressing social problems. Described as “the prototype for urban education in the 21st century,” The Shriver Center was recognized in 2000 by the Templeton Foundation for its “strong commitment to character development and the strengths of its programs.”

The Shriver Center can be thought of in terms of three kinds of “place”: physical, institutional, and ideational. UMBC has provided the Center with the first floor of the campus’ Public Policy Building, a very visible location with high student traffic and home to multiple public service lectures and presentations. This placement was not immediate; in fact, the Center moved quite frequently as our campus grew over the last ten years. Eventually, because of the growth and success of The Shriver Center programs, it was necessary for the university to prioritize the creation of a special physical setting for the Center. Strong and consistent support of Center initiatives by faculty and staff argued in favor of the Center’s placement in a high-profile location, a decision that has reinforced the Center’s centrality to UMBC’s vision and mission as a public research university.

The Center also benefits from our *institutional* place within the administration. In addition to multiple full-time positions dedicated to service-learning, UMBC funds an executive director for the Center who also serves as the Vice Provost for Community Partnerships, reporting directly to the Provost. The Center’s location within Academic Affairs supports our academically-based experiential education initiatives in several ways. The Center benefits from reporting directly to the chief academic officer since university-wide academic planning directly involves Center leadership staff. This structure promotes frequent contact with academic departments, including chairs and senior faculty, through formal and informal events, meetings, and outreach activities.

Institutional barriers still present a challenge to engagement, however, despite the many advantages of our placement within the university. The priority of research in tenure and promotion decisions may prevent some academic departments from fully engaging with the Center, and the engagement of full departments, not just individual faculty, is our goal. Additionally, service-learning would benefit from the creation of a more institutionalized “place” within the undergraduate curriculum. A further shift from co-curricular to curricular service would increase the integration of theory and practice, while institutional support for a minor in service-learning or graduate certificate programs would provide students with increased incentives for sustained participation. Indeed, although we have achieved success in engaging faculty within and across departments over the years, increased engagement will take direct and sustained effort by the Provost, Deans, and Department Chairs, and will require the creation of new incentives for faculty who are involved in community service.

Intellectually, the work of the Center has high currency in the academic discourse at UMBC. The Center’s rich and diverse portfolio of programs provides a focus for research, teaching, and education at the university. The university’s Honors College is directly engaged through service-learning courses, and a visible Faculty Advisory

Board informs new policies and programs. External grants and contracts pair Center staff and university faculty as partners in the delivery of educational components of research or direct service grants through service-learning or K-12 outreach activities. The Center's recent engagement of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics faculty has resulted in several innovative and research-based service delivery programs supported by the National Science Foundation that directly connect faculty and students to some of Baltimore's high-need schools.

By providing faculty and students with (1) a physical place to support civic engagement activities, (2) a central place within the university structure to support their research and other academic pursuits, and (3) a place where ideas of service and engagement are facilitated (e.g., service-learning courses, credit-bearing internships), UMBC fosters successful engagement that directly affects the institutional culture.

Talent: Utilizing Resources and Coordination to Engage Students, Faculty, and Staff

Attracting and engaging faculty and student talent is critical for successful institutional engagement. Through internal budget and resource allocations, UMBC provides the mechanisms and resources necessary to create a setting that effectively responds to Boyer's call. The Shriver Center's programs attempt to engage and connect the strengths and resources of faculty, staff and students at UMBC to discover and implement creative solutions to social problems. Through the creation of university-community partnerships, we attempt to address the most pressing issues of the city, with a special focus on the Baltimore area. One of the ways we foster these university-community relationships is through our service-learning programs. When service is effectively integrated with academic study, it enhances student learning and benefits the community. Research from the Kellogg Foundation (among others), suggests that service-learning provides increased student engagement, improved academic achievement, and stronger ties to schools, communities, and society.

Successful faculty engagement at UMBC has resulted from a combination of financial resources and sound mechanisms for providing appropriate training and support for service-learning through The Shriver Center. The Center has had particular success in engaging faculty by providing them with small, direct incentives (\$2,500 each). Thanks in part to a decade of such mini-grants, there now exists widespread faculty acceptance of service-learning as a valid approach to teaching and learning.

The Center has also been able to impact engagement at other colleges and universities in Baltimore through its involvement in the Shriver Center Higher Education Consortium. The Consortium began as and remains a core part of the mission of the Center, seeking to focus, in an integrated way, the resources of the colleges and universities of Greater Baltimore on pressing issues of the region. Consortium activities support the institutionalization of service-learning at both the undergraduate and graduate level through hosting local conferences, providing sub-grants to faculty

and departments at consortium partner institutions, and through the placement of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers in service-learning graduate assistantships through the Center's Shriver Peaceworker Program.

To be sure, challenges remain. UMBC is a rapidly developing research institution, and the institutional incentives for faculty to engage in service-learning are not always evident. As part of a recent external review of the Center, one interviewed faculty member commented, "The reward system does not encourage faculty involvement. As a 'research one' institution, if you don't do research, you don't get tenure or promoted" (Battistoni and Sovilla 2005). Greater faculty development is needed if we are to continue to institutionalize service-learning and civic engagement at UMBC. Informal support for faculty has emerged, however, as the Center has sought ways to lower barriers for them to utilize community connections developed by the Center through service-learning partnerships as opportunities for research. The integration of traditional research into our service programs, as well as new steps towards action research opportunities with community partners, moves us closer to greater faculty collaboration.

At the student level, the Center's initiatives engage both undergraduate and graduate students from all disciplines to work with UMBC and The Shriver Center. The Center's unique graduate service-learning fellowship program, the Shriver Peaceworker Program, is another key example of UMBC's commitment to internal resource allocation. This fellowship is a rigorous, two-year service-learning program integrating community service, graduate study, and ethical reflection in order to prepare citizen leaders who can creatively respond to the economic, social, and cultural problems confronting the United States today. It is the Center that is responsible for securing funding for participating students to study at UMBC or one of our consortium partner institutions comprised of the eleven other four-year colleges and universities in the greater Baltimore area. Through direct solicitation of funding from community-based host-sites and through arrangements with the financial aid office and the graduate school at UMBC, a variety of stakeholders participate in ensuring that sufficient funding is indeed achieved.

Internal resource allocation also serves as a tool to efficiently administer service-learning. By bringing the administrative costs of experiential education programs at UMBC under the auspices of The Shriver Center, UMBC's service-learning programs benefit from the existing resource allocations that UMBC provides for internships and cooperative education placements. As is the case with internship and cooperative education opportunities, The Shriver Center offers a wide array of service-learning opportunities. Students can choose from a long list of community partners with whom we collaborate and make arrangements to tutor, mentor, or otherwise serve for three-to-five hours each week. Through goals-setting and ethical reflection activities, each student completes a practicum course, adapted from the internship and cooperative education practicum, designed to ensure that best practices in service-learning are in place. Additionally, many of these students elect to combine their service with one of

several service-learning courses already sponsored by UMBC faculty. This model enhances education allowing effectiveness through the connection of theory to practice, while tapping existing resources to enhance service-learning and civic engagement opportunities for UMBC students and faculty.

The importance of talent extends to the staff of the Center. Without a dedicated, knowledgeable, and motivated staff, it is challenging to promote engagement activities, particularly when the reward structure for participation in Center activities for faculty and students is not always evident. The Center has benefited from low turnover among staff, as was recently noted in our external review (Battistoni and Sovilla 2005). We believe that this is due to two factors. The first is the Center's creation of and support for learning opportunities for staff interested in professional and personal development. The second factor is the intentional decision to view Center initiatives as an incubator for both programs and talent. Our commitment to our human resources increases the likelihood of a stronger connection to and understanding of the mission of the organization. The Center certainly benefits from the integration of staff and faculty who are directly involved in the planning and administration of civic engagement activities.

The commitment of staffing resources by the university also provides an informal benefit to the campus community in general. Staff serve as "de facto" experts in areas of growing importance to the university, including K-12 outreach efforts. Faculty have sought support from Center staff as they respond to new education outreach requirements for research funding by the National Science Foundation. We are often well-suited to support these initiatives, as our work in communities and schools over the past decade through service-learning has allowed us to build strong partnerships, providing key expertise for faculty who may have less experience collaborating with the community. Our placement within Academic Affairs further supports the integration of research and service, as the enabling mechanisms are in place to support multi-department, grant-funded programs.

The Shriver Center also plays a crucial role in helping to coordinate community-based activities at UMBC. Through the Center, nearly 400 undergraduate students serve in sustained academic service-learning placements each academic year in partnership with over 25 community organizations and ten academic departments. One of the programs that most directly addresses civic engagement at UMBC is the Shriver Living Learning Center (SLLC). Operated in collaboration with the Division of Student Affairs, Residential Life Office, and supported by the Provost's Office, the Center's Shriver Living Learning Center represents a living-learning community dedicated to service-learning and civic engagement. All participants are involved in year-long service-learning activities, a one-credit course on civic engagement, and academic reflection through three-credit service-learning courses offered in multiple disciplines. The one-credit course, taught each fall, provides SLLC students with an opportunity to explore civic engagement while developing policy papers that address social issues they encounter through their service-learning experiences as tutors or mentors. Again, by leveraging existing resources (e.g., residential housing contracts,

existing service-learning courses), the Center is able to enhance the civic engagement experiences of many of the undergraduate students participating in service-learning.

Conclusion: Learning from Experience

In his landmark essay “Creating the New American College,” Ernest Boyer called upon the nation to rethink the role of higher education and its national purpose (Boyer 1994). Boyer called The Shriver Center a prototype of the New American College and also served as its founding Chair, drafting its mission of service to urban America (Boyer 1994). Sparked by Boyer’s vision of the scholarship of application and the practical idealism of Eunice and Sargent Shriver, The Shriver Center at UMBC serves as the institutional leader of the Shriver Center Higher Education Consortium and the university-wide headquarters for service-learning, internships, and experiential education programs. The Center also develops, leads, and funds innovative and effective service delivery programs. The strength of our vision has been key to our impact on the campus’ focus on engagement, which is now included in the University’s mission and vision statements.

Drawing on our reflective lessons, public dialogue, and shared learning over ten years of development, The Shriver Center is helping to advance the national conversation about the role of higher education in addressing the most pressing needs of our urban centers. The availability of mechanisms and resources to support this commitment—be they in the form of mini-grants to faculty, a well-staffed Center with the resources it needs to effectively facilitate curricular and co-curricular campus community connections, or the breadth of the vision and approach to engagement—is crucial to this work.

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