

INSTITUTIONAL ENGAGEMENT WITHIN A LAND-GRANT COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE: PERCEPTIONS OF FACULTY, STAFF, AND ADMINISTRATORS

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Abstract

*Significant movement is afoot in land-grant colleges of agriculture around a reinvigoration of institutional engagement as well as efforts to reform the 'ivory tower' from societal isolation and irrelevance. This movement is based on the claim that land-grant institutions should play a key role in sustaining our democracy and collaborating to solve complex societal problems. Against this backdrop, in February 1999, the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities issued the third of its reports, *Returning to Our Roots: The Engaged Institution* (NASULGC, 1999), calling for greater institutional engagement with society. In light of the Kellogg Commission report, the purpose of this research project was to obtain empirical evidence of the perceptions held by college of agriculture faculty, staff members, and administrators regarding the engagement initiative.*

Introduction/Theoretical Framework

A 1999 watershed document by the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities, entitled *The Engaged Institution* (NASULGC, 1999), confronted state and land-grant universities across the United States. This document has had an immense impact on universities and land-grant colleges of agriculture (LGCA). It addressed the inadequacies of the present state university and land-grant college system and emphasized the need to go beyond outreach and service to 'engagement.' The Commission recommended that institutional leaders develop plans for engagement, "plans that recognize engagement as not something separate and distinct from the university [college] but part of its core mission" (p. 31).

Prior to the Kellogg Commission, James Meyer, Chancellor Emeritus, University of California-Davis, in *Rethinking the Outlook of Colleges Whose Roots Have Been in Agriculture* (1992), defined the problems of the LGCA and called for an in-depth

investigation. Meyer's next document, *The Stalemate in Food and Agricultural Research, Teaching and Extension* (1993), examined why these colleges have not changed as rapidly as they might have, and concluded that the stagnancy was due to the mindset, uncertain mission, ineffective leadership, and inappropriate organizations. That is, Meyer concluded, "they need help to escape from old ideas, which means escaping from old organizations built on the past" (p. 10).

Meyer's third study, *Transforming the Land-Grant College of Agriculture for the Twenty-First Century* (1995), examined how to make changes in possibly one of the most intractable of all organizations – the university. Meyer (1995) declared, "today's land-grant colleges of agriculture are mature organizations in need of revitalization and renewal" (p. 1). In his fourth study, *Re-Engineering the Land-Grant College of Agriculture* (1997), Meyer concluded, "the LGCA has reached a defining moment in its history," (p. 3) and he declared "to reinvent the land-grant college, efforts of individual colleges to change should begin from the

bottom up, institution by institution, not from the top down” (p. 5). He later issued a challenge to develop a well-thought-out process for reengineering the land-grant college of agriculture and encouraged the development of a “strategic plan” to re-engineer itself to meet its own needs. Meyer (1997) stated:

“There is no clear blueprint for academia to follow in remodeling itself. The great variation among the individual LGCAs means each must develop its own blueprint for local use” (p. v).

However, as the Kellogg Commission (NASULGC, 1999) declared, “developing such a plan will be challenging. But time and trouble invested in the effort at the front end will pay significant dividends down the line” (p. 32). According to Rowley, Lujan, and Dolence (1997), “strategic planning is a formal process designed to help a college identify and maintain an optimal alignment with the most important elements the environment within which the university resides” (p. 14). This environment consists of “the political, social, economic, technological, and educational ecosystem, both internal and external to the university” (Rowley, Lujan & Dolence, 1997, p. 15). Therefore, if institutional engagement is to succeed within the LGCA, it is imperative to conduct a needs assessment of faculty, staff, and administrators.

Purpose and Objectives

The primary purpose of this study was to identify and examine the perceptions held by faculty, staff members, and administrators from a Midwest land-grant college of agriculture regarding implementing recommendations from the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities’ third report *The Engaged Institution* (NASULGC, 1999). A second purpose was to describe the implications of these perceptions as they relate to the process of planning for institutional engagement. To achieve the aforementioned purposes the following objectives guided this study:

1. To identify what steps are needed to ensure that the college of agriculture is truly attentive, responsive, and interactive with its constituency.
2. What steps need to be taken by faculty, administration, and staff members to encourage joint academic-community definitions to problems, solutions, and successes?
3. What are LGCA faculty, staff members and administrator opinions regarding the importance of maintaining a stance of academic neutrality as outlined by the Kellogg Commission?
4. Identify examples of how LGCA faculty, staff members, and administrators believe or do not believe LCGA’s can be ‘easier to do business with’.
5. Identify what measures should be taken to integrate the engagement agenda with the LGCA’s research, teaching, and outreach mission.
6. Ascertain the actions needed to ensure that the internal structure of the LGCA embraces the engagement agenda.
7. What type of alliances and strategic partnerships do faculty, staff members and administrators believe are currently in place or need to be developed to acquire resources to set the institutional engagement agenda in motion?

Methods

To meet these objectives, this investigation used an existential-phenomenological approach and the phenomenological research method in particular. This unique method is used to locate underlying themes or patterns for an observed event in a search for structure and meaning (Beshai, 1971). It is based on a grounded, inductive approach to theory building and focuses on what a person experiences in a personal, first-order language that is as close to the lived experience as possible (Brockelman, 1980; Giorgi, 1970; Kruger, 1988; Polkinghorne, 1982). The general format of the phenomenological method may be

summarized as: 1) gathering a full set of naive descriptions from persons who had the particular experience; 2) analyzing the descriptions in order to grasp common elements that make the experience what it is; and 3) describing or giving a clear, accurate and articulate account of the phenomenon so that it can be understood by others (Polkinghorne, 1989).

The respondents were individually asked to use their own words to relate their experiences with the engagement agenda set forth by the Kellogg Commission in as much detail as possible. They recorded their insights on a web-based instrument (Dillman, 2000) using seven open-ended questions (see Table 1) instead of face-to-face interviews. This offered them the opportunity to take their time, reflect on their experiences, and reconstruct the event in more detail. Another reason for the use of written descriptions is that it is a legitimate alternative to interviewing in the phenomenological tradition (Taylor &

Bogdan, 1984). Also, according to Clandinin and Connelly (1994), the current methodological preference is toward studying texts rather than using interviews. It is assumed that meaning is contained in narrative texts and the study of texts is therefore the primary focus of educational studies.

The respondents were instructed to: “Read the definition of each component of the Kellogg Commission’s Engaged Institution Seven-Part Test and describe your subjective experience of each element in as much detail as possible.” They were assured that responses were kept confidential. The respondents delivered their written stories over a three-week period. The population for this study consisted of faculty, staff members, and administrators from a Midwest land-grant college of agriculture. Of the 410 respondents contacted, 192 returned the instrument, a response rate of 47%.

Table 1
Research Instrument Questions

Questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What steps are needed to ensure that the college of agriculture is truly attentive, responsive and interactive with its constituency? • What steps need to be taken by faculty, administration and staff members to encourage joint academic-community definitions to problems, solutions, and success? • What is your opinion regarding the importance of maintaining a stance of academic neutrality as outlined by the Kellogg Commission? • Give examples of how you believe or do not believe we make ourselves “easy to do business with?” • What measures should be taken to assist with integrating the engagement agenda with the research, teaching and outreach mission of your department? • What actions should be taken to ensure that the internal structure of your department embraces the engagement agenda? • What type of alliances and strategic partnerships do you believe are currently in place or need to be developed to acquire resources to set the institutional engagement agenda in motion?

Data Analysis

Because phenomenological studies are not driven by preconceived theoretical constructs and research hypotheses, but rather a desire to illuminate a given phenomenon (and reveal the essences appertaining), the researcher can expect to be deeply immersed in data which may seem obtuse. This initial obfuscation can (and should) be met with an attitude of openness and a willingness on the part of the researcher to allow the phenomena to present itself. Again, rigorous attention to method is important here, and the phenomenological epoché (bracketing) was employed so that the revealed experiences are uncontaminated by prior learning and bias (Davey, 1999).

The purpose of the investigation was to empirically determine what institutional engagement means to faculty, staff members, and administrators, instead of accepting a predetermined definition. Thus, the study was approached with no preceding ideas as to the possible meaning of the research event for faculty, staff members and administrators in a college of agriculture. The researchers bracketed out any preconceived ideas and allowed the body of data to speak for itself (so to speak).

In order to enhance the credibility of the data, the responses to the questions were closely examined to determine whether they were sharing *experience* rather than pre-digested theoretical knowledge. The protocols (descriptions) were read and reread independently of each other in order to obtain an intuitive, holistic grasp of the protocol and to make sure that each natural meaning unit would be interpreted in context. A natural meaning unit (NMU) is "...a statement made by an individual which is self-defining and self-delimitating in the expression of a single, recognizable aspect of the individual's experience..." (Stones, 1988, p. 153).

After reading and rereading the protocols, each NMU was listed and numbered. The NMUs were stated in the same words used by the respondents. The NMUs were then collapsed into emergent themes. The researchers typed a draft description of each theme. Faculty, staff

members, and administrators were sent copies of their descriptions to check for errors and to answer the question: "Does this reflect your experience?" This was done to enhance the study's credibility by verifying the data obtained from participants and incorporating changes in a revised document. A brief summary of each theme was then compiled. These summaries are in fact reductions and linguistic transformations of the natural meaning of the event in a condensed form, while staying as close as possible to the essence of each description. Repetitive material was discarded.

The final step in a phenomenological analysis is to derive individual situated structures, and/or a general account of an events structure. This investigation's objective was to derive a general structure. The themes identified for each respondent were clustered into a number of general themes that appeared to be common to all the respondents' descriptions. An essential general structure which reflected the collective experiences of the faculty, staff members, and administrators was formulated.

To ensure that the researcher's own understanding of the general themes accurately reflected the understanding of the respondents, the participants were asked to comment on the general themes identified.

Findings and Analysis

The respondents described a mosaic of approaches to the institutional engagement seven-part test (responsiveness, respect for partners, academic neutrality, accessibility, integration, coordination, and resource partnership) (NASULGC, 1999, p. 29). The following section provides an overview of respondent demographics and areas that emerged as key issues to consider when implementing the engagement initiative within a LGCA.

Demographic Data

From the responses of 192 faculty, staff members, and administrators, 77% ($n=148$) were faculty, 8% ($n=16$) staff members, and 14% ($n=28$) administrators. Of the 176 faculty and administrator respondents,

nearly one-half 42% ($n=74$) held the rank of associate professor, 19% ($n=33$) were full professors and the remaining 39% ($n=69$) were assistant professors. As per the number of years associated with the institution, 10% ($n=20$) have been 0-5 years; 19% ($n=36$) 6-10 years; 14% ($n=26$) 11-15 years; 10% ($n=20$) 16-20 years; 25% ($n=48$) 21-25 years; 14% ($n=26$) 26-30 years; and 8% ($n=16$) 31+ years. More than half (61%) of the respondents had tenure.

Internal College Issues

As a center for research and the development of technology, the college fulfills both epistemological and economic roles. A center for research suggests a professor-centered arena where success depends on research grants and publications. In a discussion on the dilemmas of choice facing research universities, Cole (1994) points out that academic leaders recruit and support scientists and scholars who have made or are apt to make seminal discoveries — those who define fields and specialties. The emphasis is on producing new knowledge. In looking at the engagement initiative, several respondents concur with Cole, and the following statement reflects their responses:

We need to hire the best-trained broad based scholars in our fields. At first blush this may not sound like the answer, but I firmly believe that it is a critical part of providing effective interaction with our constituents. The biggest mistake we make in hiring is to focus jobs and job descriptions narrowly on single areas. Faculty are around the university for 30+ years, but the important issues of the day change on a regular basis. If we are to seriously serve our constituents in the long term, we need to continue to hire outstanding scholars with broad interests and technical abilities so they can work on the ever-changing problems and issues of the day (Professor).

Corollary to recruitment and support emphasis, however, is the application of knowledge through integration, where expertise appears to be the defining criterion. In this role, the LGCA has a contract with society to supply expertise in the form of problem solutions or the next cohort of experts, and the public has a direct stake in the outcomes. Two respondents noted that in order to advance the engagement initiative, the current emphasis on the expert-model may need to be reconsidered.

In my opinion the first step towards institutional engagement would be to develop a true process whereby [the institution] 'shakes' its' big-brother, all-knowing, expert-model image (Associate Professor).

It appears that we first need to admit that we do have an expert-model focus, rather than a societal needs focus, then admit that changing that philosophy will be very, very difficult, followed by expending resources to develop new processes for dialoguing with our publics, and then finally reward change in our processes that salute and work toward permeability (Associate Professor).

The LGCA's role as intellectual center, research producer, and societal developer often overlaps. Advocates of one or another role are more likely to divide along disciplinary lines than according to the type of role one plays in the institution (faculty, staff members, and administrators). The demand being placed on LGCA to shift priorities and respond to a wider constituency base was apparent in responses from the respondents. The following respondents provided specific examples of how issues can be addressed and the LGCA can become reactive to societal needs.

Place priority on the needs of our stakeholders. Right now I think that we are often driven by

dollars rather than serving the needs of people. This is not in step with the land-grant philosophy (Assistant Professor).

We need to make sure that we are cognizant of the portions of the constituency that are non-farm stakeholders. Agriculture, and our mission relative to it, involves much more than the traditional approaches to clientele needs. Urban and community agriculture are much broader than farming, and they require that we address those needs in novel ways (Associate Professor).

We need to really listen to agriculture and natural resources interests and truly seek their input. To date, it seems that we just listen to the organized commodity groups that are little more than lobbyists for a rather narrow group of agricultural special interests. Agriculture, to be viable in the future, MUST be more flexible, sustainable and broad--and, if we are to actually be "ag and natural resources," then we must seek out the opinions of both urban and rural people about natural resource issues and concerns. This includes people, agencies and organizations that know little about agriculture (in the traditional sense) but know and care a lot about the state, about its culture, and about all of its natural resources (Professor).

Criterion of Exclusive Competence

To differentiate the nature of the LGCA's mission within the larger community, one important criterion is whether some other social agency can respond to the problem or whether only the college is equipped to deal with it. By accepting the transfer of resources from a community, locally or more broadly, the college commits itself to delivering certain

services to the community. One respondent explained why direction to knowledge is just as important as discovering knowledge:

The capacity to serve our stakeholders in diverse ways is the most critical aspect of engagement. If we are even perceived as just another group promoting self-interest, we will not be listened to or, as often, invited to speak. If we cannot give sound, knowledgeable, scholarly answers, we should reference the questions to someone who can. Helping people to find the right answers is as important as having the right answers (Professor).

LGCAs may feel particularly flooded by demands to respond to a wide variety of needs, more so when the resources that are required to respond exceed the college's capacity. When college resources are being cut, a redefinition of the role that affects how the college operates becomes imperative. One respondent noted that this redefinition of engagement has an impact on several levels.

The public is redefining their expectations of the university as usual. Policy makers (like the Kellogg Foundation), those people who provide funding to the university, are reexamining this redefinition, not only within light of their own organizational value system but in light of what the constituency argues the university should do. Yet, many often overlook the simple premises, that if engagement is to take hold in the university it needs to be made a consistent and important part of the university recognition and reward system. It cannot be RESEARCH and GRANTS and PUBLICATIONS and then teaching and then extension, and then "service." In and of itself service is a relatively non-

scholarly term. Evidence of "engagement" should be considered a core and fundamental part of research, teaching and extension. Not just outreach as is classical for extension but listening and responding (Professor).

The following respondents provide two concrete examples of how college faculty have been given freedom to define their role and disconnect from society.

To cut to the chase, most of us are impossibly saturated with activities and the notion that yet another sink for our time exists is overwhelming. We deal with this at the organizational level by making it the responsibility of some of us to be people who represent us with the public and who should channel appropriate information to the remainder of us when relevant. This second step is completely broken down for a number of reasons. One clear reason is that in the internal "hierarchy of prestige" researchers who draw large external grants and busy themselves with techniques do not feel beholden to anyone else, least of all extension personnel with ideas that come from the community level. Simply put the incentives and rewards that most matter to career-minded faculty at universities have little to nothing to do with public and social goals in practice, though in theory these themes are loudly touted (Professor).

One of the criticisms being leveled at any research university is that the focus and the emphasis is too much on research and not enough on providing a quality education or serving the needs of the larger community. I think that those charges are to some extent accurate, but they dismiss

what the university or college of agriculture really does for a community. This is a very complex place, and there are a lot of things that affect its operation...the operational load of this college like others was based on a time when there was access to a lot of resources so that we could follow different directions. In the process of doing that, not only did we overextend ourselves but we created certain expectations that we were not able to meet for a variety of reasons. I think now we need to say, "What are those expectations, and which ones can we adequately meet, and which ones can we not meet and maybe are the province of some other group?" (Professor).

It is imperative to analyze what roles other social agencies can accomplish as a means of limiting the pressure to fulfill all of society's needs, thus diverting attention from what is most critical for the LGCA to accomplish. One respondent took stock in the competency the college should provide to meet societal changes:

The college should maintain an image as a source of objective science, for that is our only real claim to fame. If our image is tainted by research funded by outside sources of major money (some even having proprietary claims), maintenance of the facilitator with no position, or extension programs for only those who pay, our claim is undermined. There are times when the science of a situation must be laid out for the benefit of society even though it is politically unwanted at the time. Only through providing objective science can the college maintain a role in society that is important and is unique (Associate Professor).

As this respondent's statement encapsulates, it is clear that the advancement of knowledge is the most central mission to a university or college. On the other hand, the constituency the college serves continues to impose certain conditions on the institution's operation, while calling for greater responsiveness on behalf of the institution in looking more closely at the knowledge needs of society.

Yet, the nature of the constituency of a college, and the extent to which that constituency also provides resources, has become more important in determining the college's mission. Entitled resources made available to higher education through government and other official channels are being reallocated, making research grants a more important resource. The threat of reallocated resources has led colleges to be more accountable and to restructure — to do more with less, or to decide what has to go and who it will continue to serve.

The data made it clear that the reallocated resources made available to the college through official channels have impacted how faculty conduct business. Many respondents spoke about scarce resources, some relating resources to a sort of no-win situation, at the department and college level. Others focused on reorganizing the college's activities to gain resources for the engagement initiative:

In order to be real, engagement issues need to be funded from reallocation of current resources. I believe that the number one resource for engagement will come from our HUMAN RESOURCE. Our best frontal attack would be to make engagement "job one" within the college then allocate the appropriate financial resources to activate the essential human resource (Associate Professor).

It's a catch 22...we need constituent support to get the resources to be more engaged...but in order to get that support we already need to be engaged...and we aren't. So

without cutting something major out and replacing it with an orientation to engagement we don't have the resources to do it right (Associate Professor).

Producing the right outcomes with palpable results will require using all resources efficiently and making sure everyone is working toward the same goal. If you ask for the right things, this will take care of itself. All it requires is leadership from top to bottom (Associate Professor).

Departments are afraid to place value on engagement to the point that faculty and staff will devote resources to it. Again, it goes back to the reward system. Faculty know how to translate expert knowledge into something the public can use, but the rewards to do so are not there. Colleges and the university have to demonstrate they will reward engagement before faculty will take a chance (Professor).

The issue of funding is changing the way colleges think about their missions. One respondent contends that the financial situation faculty face today constitutes a wake-up call for faculty and administrators to ask the question, "Why are we here?" The respondents also contend that in answering this question, there is a need to establish goals and procedures to accompany the necessary reward system adjustments.

A reward system based on criteria other than grantsmanship is needed. As long as highest dollar brought into the university receives the highest pay raises, awards, and recognitions individuals will pursue funding where they can obtain it regardless of the applicability to major college stakeholders. Direction of the college is now determined by

funding sources. Work floats to the mainstream of funding resulting in important work in areas without major funding to go undone. If you can tell me the focus of future funding, I can tell you the focus of work within the college regardless of what plans our stakeholders say. He who has the gold makes the rules (Associate Professor).

The effect of the threat of dwindling resources is twofold. First, as one respondent stated, it has provided a need to be more accountable. That is, faculty need to demonstrate that society is being served efficiently and effectively.

To become an engaged institution, we first have to understand our stakeholder needs. Too often our faculty and institution is too far disconnected from societal needs. For example, the mundane production questions and problems at the producer and 'local community partner' level are sometimes addressed by Extension staff and a few 'applied research-oriented' campus-based faculty. However, most of the campus-based research faculty are so far into their "basic" and "publishable" research areas that they often cannot communicate their research and its worth to a producer client. This lack of accountability to local needs is most likely in response to the review process in place (publish or perish) (Assistant Professor).

Second, the data also revealed the need to restructure to strengthen the link between performance and the reward system.

Respondents provided concrete examples of how important the reward system, as intractable as it may now seem, is to the process of building and maintaining institutional engagement.

The reward system needs to be put in line with strategic plans and strategic plans need to be aligned with stakeholder needs. One could argue that rewards are in line with strategic plans and strategic plans are in line with current funding sources. Problems should be defined and then funds sought to solve the problem, instead of funding being found, and problems defined to acquire the funds (Professor).

Our department is reasonably well linked with some agencies but poorly partnered with private industry. Both are important, but the degree to which they are important will vary by the department. I believe that some departments are, in fact, too closely linked with some industries, causing their research agendas to be slanted toward those of their partners. While we must certainly respond to the needs of our constituents, we must not lose sight of the need to continue to answer more basic research questions that lead to practical insights down the road. I think we also need to be more interdisciplinary in our approaches. This will allow us to tap into each others strengths across disciplines and create new, maybe better, solutions to problems than when we work in isolation. There must also be created recognition and institutional advancement for those that engage in interdisciplinary projects (teaching, research, or Extension). The reward system for such efforts simply does not exist now (Associate Professor).

The internal stakeholders (faculty, staff members, and administrators) are gaining greater voice in the direction a college or university takes. Thus, accountability and

the reward system become immediate challenges, if the engagement initiative is to move forward as called for by the Kellogg Commission (NASULGC, 1999).

Criterion of Neutrality

Since the beginning of the land-grant institution, when government made resources available in response to societal needs, the institution expanded to satisfy both foreseeable and unforeseeable needs. Now that continuing government reallocations have become a reality, some means of determining society's needs have gained priority and are seen as essential. A pivotal test case of what a college can be expected to do within society is the question of institutional purpose:

A university must be above the day-to-day fray of public choice issues while at the same time being recognized for its ability to provide meaningful insight into the future. In other words, I accept the concept that a university is an economic and social engine that promotes societal development and equality, but if we're dealing with today's issues we're not really a university. We're simply another social agency, economic bureau, etc. We need to be the people who prepare society for tomorrow's issues. All of this says we need to be a recognized neutral albeit knowledgeable and valuable party (Professor).

If institutional engagement's role is to strengthen the institution's availability to its constituency, then the LGCA will be evaluated against the criterion of how well it aids a broad spectrum of constituency groups. These respondents spoke to the need for constituency input in the following manner.

Needs assessments, community round tables, listening to others than those who are presently in power. Many within the college never meet regularly with

stakeholders outside the institution; it might be beneficial to require our academics to meet with potential stakeholders (although this would probably fail because faculty would be against it) (Staff Member).

The targeted population should be the primary partner, then the department should search for others interested in meeting the same need and work together to provide the service. Efforts should be made to see how the primary partner can meet needs of the department (Assistant Professor).

A truly representative group of constituents should meet with faculty, staff and administration. Currently there is input to the administration, but not to faculty and staff (Associate Professor).

Finding ways to gain constituency input was a continued theme that ran throughout this study. If, however, the college is envisioned as a center of intellect biased by funds, as the following respondent suggests, the institution's neutrality may be called into question and possibly affect how knowledge is developed and perceived:

I doubt we are neutral now. Big money has biased us, neutrality is important to keep interest by broad constituencies and not just special interest groups. (Professor)

I'm concerned about the growing number of alliances between our college and private companies. I understand the motivation to get sponsorship and funding from private companies, but I worry about the potential for inappropriate influence on students or research outcomes (Associate Professor).

Neutrality is essential. Our role in society must be one of an honest broker of information. If we are perceived as being beholden to any special interests we will lose credibility. Already too many in our state believe that our university is heavily influenced by industrial money, and that the college of agriculture cares only for large agribusiness concerns (Professor).

Criterion of Clarification

Finally, as these respondents contend, if institutional engagement is to become one of the most essential missions of the college, then greater clarification is needed.

The question that I think really needs to be asked is, 'What is engagement?' I think there is a disconnect among faculty and administration regarding engagement. I've heard about the new strategic plan regarding engagement, but don't really know what that means, and it has had no effect on my job as a faculty member. We faculty continue to research and teach, while administrators worry about things like engagement (Associate Professor).

No one has taken the time to explain what engagement is, other than serving clientele, which is what we do now. I have no idea what the practical implication or definition of engagement is, and the impact it has on my position (Associate Professor).

As these statements highlight, because institutional engagement is a complex concept, and the LGCA is an equally complex institution, clarification is essential. It appears that a crucial step may be to establish opportunities for internal agents to engage in critical reflection of engagement in their programs, departments, and the

college. Ultimately, what may nurture the unfolding of institutional engagement will be serious, active experimentation, where organizational actors wrestle with crucial strategic and operational issues. Several respondents explained why such dialogue and clarification is so important:

First the question assumes that my department has some sort of structure... maybe so, maybe no. I honestly believe that among the first steps to an engagement agenda is in getting the DEO on board. I do not feel this is the case in my department. This being the case, in my department the key to an internal structural embrace would be to have a STRONG endorsement from the Dean... thereby causing the DEO to fall in line. The DEO would need to allow ample time to the faculty to dialogue and reach an agreement on what engagement will look like departmentally (Professor).

'Engagement' needs to be clearly explained. At present many faculty perceive it simply as the latest buzzword and do not have a clear understanding of what it means (Associate Professor).

These respondents confirm that many structural and power issues must be considered prior to moving the engagement agenda forward within the LGCA.

My impression is that as in most large organizations, top administration is not very close to the faculty ranks. Usually, whether or not such problems are remedied depends on personalities more than organizational structure. But structure should be designed to help, of course (Associate Professor).

The administration needs to demonstrate by example a

sincere willingness to respond to the needs and concerns of faculty regarding institutional engagement. If structural changes are not made to reward faculty for becoming engaged, then things will stay the same and gaps will continue to be created between social needs and institutional activities (Associate Professor).

The administration could more actively engage with our constituencies and set up opportunities for departments/faculty to talk with relevant groups and individuals to discuss what our agenda ought to be (Assistant Professor).

Questions these findings raised are, “Where does the onus for institutional engagement lie?” and “What is the relationship between the role administration plays and the role faculty plays in advancing institutional engagement?”

Conclusions

Because of the design used in this study, the results can be generalized to only the participants involved. Moreover, the evidence provided should not lead to the conclusion that certain factors are more important in stimulating academic reform than others, for it seems clear that some are particularly significant. One basic fact is simply the possibility of benefit or reward. University, college, departmental, or even program change is unlikely unless the change appears to lead to greater reward than does the present paradigm. This study’s findings conclude that there is little reason for the college to build institutional engagement programs, activities or initiatives unless the reward system changes to promote the process of building and maintaining engaged institutions. Without potential rewards, change is unlikely.

A second conclusion concerns individual influence. To bring about change in the college, as in other organizations, advocacy is imperative to overcome innate

institutional inertia. Call it inspiration, leadership, persuasion, or politicking; without it, change is unlikely. Advocates not only build a unity between members with diverse interests, they can also point to the possible rewards of change — convincing members and patrons of unmet challenges, new opportunities, and desirable responsibilities. All the evidence from history, as well as from the findings of this study, confirms that institutional change tends to be highest within departments and programs where the most influential members of the institution are seen as forces for change rather than for stability.

Third, the institution’s structure has an effect on the process of change through its openness to influence. Thus the very fact of engagement needs to lead to not only requiring new responsibilities from faculty, staff, and administrators, but to reforming of responsibilities to encompass the engagement initiative into current research, teaching, and outreach functions. Likewise, structural changes in the promotion and tenure system appear to be needed prior to advancing the engagement initiative. Faculty need to be rewarded for being engaged, rather than punished for not meeting traditional research and publishing requirements.

Perhaps the most important conclusion relates to the concern about the origins of the factors that influence building and maintaining institutional engagement. Sources of educational change are primarily internal, from within the college itself; such as the spontaneous innovations of creative professors and imaginative administrations. Or are they external to the institution — imposed, of necessity, on reluctant academics by outside forces and groups? This question not only stirs antagonistic arguments; but it also raises major issues of university governance; issues of academic freedom, faculty prerogatives, professional autonomy, policy determination, and institutional accountability. It involves the problem of the best social policy regarding higher education and its control.

As the data from this study revealed, people’s attitudes are influenced by their own position. Professors, involved daily in their own improvement efforts, naturally

tend to see themselves and their colleagues as the initiators of change, just as administrators, actively working on some of the same problems more often see themselves as the key sources of impetus. If state legislators, governing board members, or external agents were asked about the sources of change, their reactions would probably display the same tendencies. Thus, to consider this issue as objectively as possible, it is necessary to examine it beyond one's own parochial perspective.

Implications

This study's findings highlight three forms of active participation that an agricultural education department can focus on in advancing the engagement initiative within the LGCA. The first refers to the direct involvement of internal stakeholders (not limited to administrators) in activities closely associated with information gaining opportunities related to the discrepancy and efficacy cues of institutional engagement. In the LGCA, this could translate to internal stakeholder participative roles in a range of situations, including working parties, joint consultative committees, quality assurance teams, institutional engagement learning communities, specific project teams, or internal stakeholder representation on specific industry councils or civic boards.

The second form of active participation that an agricultural education department can provide is leadership related to vicarious learning. The department can suggest opportunities for internal stakeholders to observe others utilizing new and innovative techniques and engagement practices. This has the potential to enhance each observer's confidence (and readiness) to attempt and adopt a technique or practice. In most cases this would constitute a reallocation of non-financial resources, principally faculty and staff time, towards engagement efforts.

The final form of active participation relates to providing opportunity for internal stakeholder taking small, incremental steps that may lead to deeper involvement and success towards a larger desired change for advancing engagement. These smaller success opportunities for internal stakeholders can generate progress towards

the larger desired change, which would closely link to the participative roles mentioned in direct participation.

Institutional engagement is not conducted in isolation from teaching and research. Effective engagement should draw on institutional academic strengths, and depend on integration with the institution's goals for teaching, learning and research. Institutional engagement requires investments in infrastructure, faculty development and organizational change. Therefore, engagement requires strategic planning to ensure success and sustainability. Every department and program needs to make its own systematic decisions about the degree to which institutional engagement is appropriate and relevant to its mission and strategic direction, as well as the college's mission and strategic plans.

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