Recommendations Report

Prepared by
The Carnegie Community Engagement
Application Committee
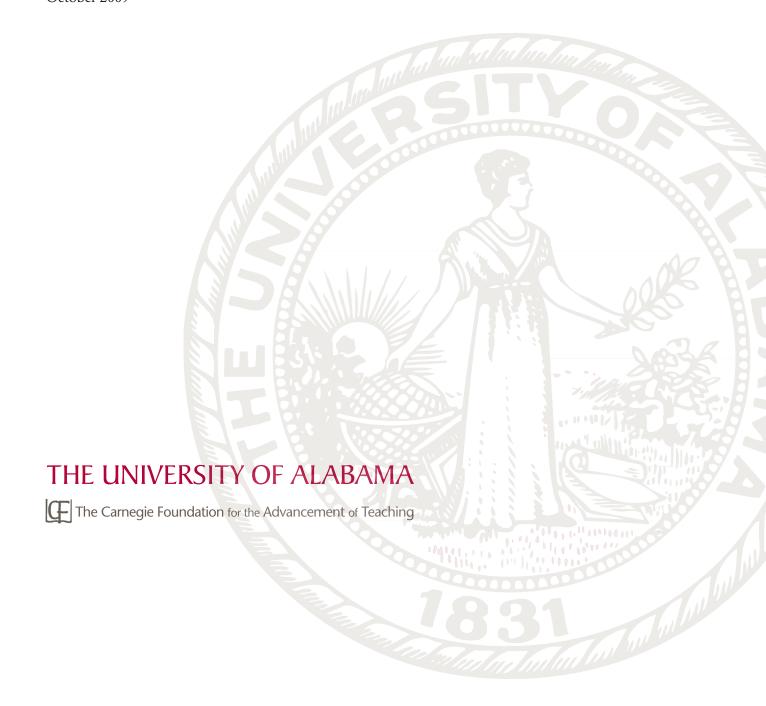
October 2009

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA

The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching

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Introduction

When we began the process of applying for the Carnegie Foundation's Community Engagement Classification, we felt certain that The University of Alabama merited that designation. The application team worked with representatives across campus to compile information substantiating the University's long history of community involvement and describing its contemporary commitment to engagement scholarship and to the sustainable, mutually beneficial community partnerships that are the heart of this work. In December 2008, The Carnegie Foundation acknowledged the depth of the University's dedication by recognizing its work with designations in both possible categories: Curricular Engagement and Outreach/Partnerships.

As we worked through this process, we saw that the introduction and/or amendment of some policies and practices could benefit the University by leveraging existing engagement to our advantage in three specific areas. These include

- improving public understanding and appreciation of the University, which would support resource allocation from public sources and donations from private ones
- improving our competitiveness for students who increasingly seek both to gain knowledge through direct experience and to apply theory to practice in public service and personal achievement
- improving our competitiveness for outstanding faculty whose work integrates teaching, research, and community collaboration.

We come now with five interrelated recommendations to make this possible. Rather than requesting additional funding or personnel, we envision that the recommendations can be implemented by realigning present activities and leveraging existing resources. We look forward to further discussion about their implementation.

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1. Align mission/vision/strategic plan with community engagement (and vice versa) and communicate this alignment through all UA messaging.

Rationale

In the same spirit in which an individual reviews and revises insurance coverage in accord with new life events, so should the University review and revise the language and promulgation of its strategic plan and mission and vision statements. By keeping these long-term statements of the University's intentions in accord with its evolving opportunities and needs, and by sharing that intentionality with our stakeholders, we improve appreciation and understanding of the University's work with all its constituent groups.

Recommended Next Steps

• Request that the owners of the 2004-2014 University of Alabama Strategic Plan and the mission and vision statements review and update their language.
• Benchmark knowledge and appreciation of community engagement in key stakeholders so that future changes can be documented and communications efforts calibrated to address them.
• Formalize message channels so that information (such as that gathered by the ongoing image survey, Governmental Relations focus groups, etc.) feeds back to senior leaders and communications staffs.
• Integrate community engagement into UA messaging.
• Ensure that each community engagement project includes a feedback component through which community members can share their assessment of what the project is accomplishing/how it is benefitting their community.

2. Adapt and/or create systems to continually, systematically, and comprehensively capture and aggregate community engagement information.

Rationale

Having and using comprehensive, quantified measures of our community engagement so that we may better know and communicate the work that is being done around given themes (such as literacy and economic development) and in given areas (such as counties and congressional districts) would give us compelling information with which to substantiate our success and validate our requests for funding. Reviewing this information could also suggest opportunities for engagement that have not yet been explored.

Recommended Next Steps

• Ensure that the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment provides leadership and central coordination of community engagement measurement data.
• Encourage departments to identify courses that meet the service learning definition (http://www.volunteer.ua.edu/definitions.html) and communicate information about these courses to the Office of the Registrar for proper coding in Banner.
• Establish a process through which departments verify each semester with the Office of the Registrar that their lists of service learning courses are accurate.
• Identify and collect data on all service learning courses and community engagement activities. Those by faculty would be identified in FAR and those by departments/degree programs would be identified in the UA Online Profile System (UAOPS). The specific assessment methods, assessment results, and modifications to the faculty service learning or community engagement activities based on the assessment findings would be collected in FAR.

• Establish a web-based system to collect UA service learning and community engagement activities that are not appropriately collected in FAR or UAOPS, and link that system to FAR and UAOPS.

3. Develop and reward a more ecumenical view of scholarship.

Rationale

The University of Alabama Faculty Handbook, which sets out our basic rules for academic hiring, promotion, and tenure, currently contains no specific reference to the scholarship of engagement. While promotion and tenure decisions are most influenced by the requirements of the specific discipline in which one teaches, failure to integrate the scholarship of engagement into our rules could hurt our ability to hire the best faculty in the market and could adversely affect faculty development once they have been hired. More than a lack of preclusion, our policies should thoughtfully articulate the University's intentionality regarding the scholarship of engagement, so that entering and current faculty can expect to do community engagement work and be credited for it.

> *... failure to integrate the scholarship of engagement into our rules could hurt our ability to hire the best faculty in the market...*

This expectation can also serve to make the work itself even better as faculty approach its design with the anticipation of publishing the results as well as creating sustainable and mutually beneficial community projects.

Recommended Next Steps

• Provost tasks the Promotion and Tenure subcommittee of the Council for Community-Based Partnerships with raising the campus discussion on alignment between engagement scholarship and recognition for tenure and promotion.

• The committee makes recommendations for revising the Recommendation for Promotion and Tenure process to ensure that engagement research is included.

• Review and revise Chapter 2--Faculty Personnel Policies and Appendix Q of the Faculty Handbook.

• Implement a direct communication strategy to make sure all deans, department heads, and tenure and promotion committees know that engagement scholarship is being valued.

• Instruct faculty, staff, students, administrators, and, where appropriate, community partners on how to document scholarly activities related to engagement research in the University data collection system recommended in Item 2 of this document and how to communicate them in annual activity reports, in applications for tenure and promotion, and in grant submissions.

4. Make service learning a hallmark component of the experience and education The University of Alabama offers its students.

Rationale

Current research on service learning has demonstrated distinct advantages for participating students. They gain decision-making and leadership skills and increase their use of critical thinking and reflective review; they demonstrate personal and interpersonal development and increased civic engagement; they gain practical experiences that help them through life. These skills and attributes are gained through meeting the arduous requirements of service learning, so having chosen demanding classes that have these advantages should be noted on students' transcripts. Developing these and other distinctions for service learning participation, while also featuring examples in University messaging, would alert prospective students who increasingly desire service learning to the opportunities available here.

Recommended Next Steps

• Use and promote the standards and procedures for awarding the community engagement notation to student transcripts.
• Use and promote the engagement distinctions for students including graduation regalia and transcript notation, CCBP annual awards, and as a criterion for awards and scholarships.
• Involve the Center for Ethics and Social Responsibility, the Office of Student Affairs, and the Office of Academic Affairs with developing a clearinghouse for all experiential learning courses and activities that will act,

   1. as a resource to faculty and staff searching for ways to offer service learning as part of their curriculum without the additional time commitment needed to plan and implement a typical service learning course,

   2. as a post-project data collection and distribution agency. A debrief exercise and an assessment instrument for each participating group could be offered from this office, and

   3. as a liaison for faculty members wanting to partner with an individual in order to publish research from a service learning project or course.

5. Improve assessment regarding community engagement.

Rationale

UA engagement activities are assessed in varying ways and levels. In completing the Carnegie application, we saw that the assessment of these activities is uneven, at best. Information describing engagement activities is relatively available, although not in a central place. Evaluation of outcomes and impact is generally less robust, and more difficult to access. Where impact evaluation does occur, it is mostly at the project level, and not aggregated at even the unit level,

much less from an institutional perspective. This circumstance suggests the following recommendations, in tandem with the next steps for Recommendations 1 and 2 in this document.

Recommended Next Steps

• Improve UA's capacity to measure outcomes, as well as inputs, in community engagement projects.
• Begin a discussion of impact, internally as well as with community partners. What do we mean? What do we value? Are projects sustainable and mutually beneficial to community as well as academe?
• Establish a formal mechanism(s) to assess community perceptions of UA engagement at the level of the project to the institutional level.
• Publish baseline audit of current activity across the campus.