

# Faculty Perceptions of Engagement as a Scholarly, Cross-Cutting Function at Michigan State University

Julie A. Hagstrom  
Crystal G. Lunsford

University Outreach and Engagement  
Michigan State University

## Purpose of Study

This qualitative research study seeks to understand faculty perceptions of their engagement work and how these perceptions align with the university's definition in light of institutional-level changes aimed at promoting and fostering engagement as scholarship.

## Context of Study

### MSU Definition of Engagement

A form of scholarship that cuts across teaching, research, and service. It involves generating, transmitting, applying, and preserving knowledge for the direct benefit of audiences in ways that are consistent with university and unit missions.

([www.msu.edu/unit/outreach/missiondefinition.html](http://www.msu.edu/unit/outreach/missiondefinition.html))

### MSU Definition of Scholarship

We believe that the essence of scholarship is the thoughtful creation, interpretation, communication, or use of knowledge that is based in the ideas and methods of recognized disciplines, professions, and interdisciplinary fields. What qualifies an activity as "scholarship" is that it be deeply informed by accumulating knowledge in some field, that the knowledge is skillfully interpreted and deployed, and that the activity is carried out with intelligent openness to new information, debate, and criticism.

([www.msu.edu/unit/outreach/missiondefinition.html](http://www.msu.edu/unit/outreach/missiondefinition.html))

## Embedding Engagement at MSU

Efforts to embed engagement as a scholarly, cross-cutting function began in 1993 and include:

- Changing the promotion and tenure form to request information on candidate's engagement activities in the teaching and research sections
- Targeting efforts at mid-level administrators (department/unit chairs) to assist in expanding definition of scholarship
- Presenting at new faculty orientation and other activities to encourage scholarly engagement
- Implementing tools to measure the volume and quality of faculty engagement
- Integrating the category on existing faculty forms (e.g. professional accomplishment and effort forms and internal grant applications)
- Developing internal grant opportunities specifically for engagement research
- Disseminating information across campus through various media

## Research Study Design

### Interview Sample

25 interviews were conducted with faculty located in two colleges:

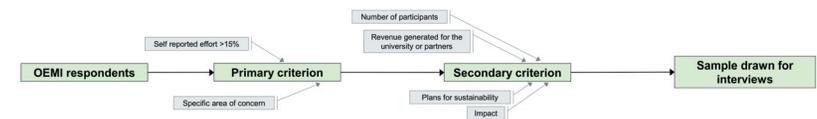
- College of Natural Science
- College of Social Sciences

Multiple disciplines and fields are represented across these colleges

Interviews ranged from 50-105 minutes

Respondents had reported they were involved in engagement through the Outreach and Engagement Measurement Instrument (OEMI)

### Selection criterion for the sample drawn from the OEMI survey



## Selected Preliminary Findings

### MSU's College of Social Science

#### Traditional disciplines

- Most faculty describe engagement as service either to professional societies or to community-based organizations, or by conducting community-based research
- Faculty do not necessarily report integrating engagement across their research and teaching
- Research interests primarily determine engagement activities
- Engagement indirectly influences teaching, for example, in terms of current knowledge of the field

#### Applied fields

- All faculty interviewed perceive engagement as fundamental to their scholarly work
- Research is informed by engagement work
- Engagement activities are integral to course content and activities of the courses they teach
- All faculty interviewed have produced scholarly works that assessed or described their engagement work

### MSU's College of Natural Sciences

- Faculty identify engagement as integral to their professional responsibilities
- Engagement is primarily defined in terms of conveying scientific knowledge to the public
- Recruiting students into scientific fields is the other way in which engagement is conceptualized
- Faculty primarily participate in engagement activities developed and run by the unit or other faculty rather than initiating the activities themselves
- They identify their engagement work as almost entirely separate from their research
- Teaching at the university has helped provide them with the instructional skills to inform the public about science rather than influencing their teaching at the university level

## Preliminary Findings Summary

	Social Science		Natural Science
	Traditional Fields	Applied Fields	
Perception of engagement as scholarship	Somewhat	Strong	Somewhat
Engagement integrated with research	Somewhat	Highly	No
Engagement integrated with teaching	Somewhat	Highly	No

## Considerations

- How does the University report its engagement work in light of the multitude of activities that faculty identify as engagement?
- Should the university definition of engagement expand to reflect the diversity of work that faculty perform under the engagement label?
- Should the University take steps to better integrate its conception of engagement among the faculty?

