



MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY

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Assessing Institution-wide Engagement Accomplishments:

Challenges, Opportunities, and Questions



Context

Universities are increasingly being asked to provide evidence of their engagement accomplishments by government, accrediting bodies, classification systems, national organizations, and the public.

MSU's Efforts to Measure Engagement

Purpose of Measurement

- Enable better monitoring of engagement investment, focus, and planning.
- Encourage faculty and academic staff to document their engagement activity more systematically and make such documentation more telling in the assessment of individual performance.
- Stimulate greater attention to engagement as a scholarly activity and what aligns with the university's definition of engagement.

Measurement Instrument

Outreach & Engagement Measurement Instrument (OEMI): Self-reported faculty and academic staff on-line survey developed to collect quantitative data on faculty and academic staff engagement for aggregation at the academic unit and institution. The instrument is designed to capture the following:

- **Time spent** on engagement activities (percent of total effort)
- **Areas of concern** on which those activities focus (e.g. health and health care, public understanding and adult learning, business and industrial development)
- **Forms** those activities take (e.g. research, non-credit and credit instruction, experiential or service learning, public events and information)
- **Locations** to which those activities are directed (Michigan, U.S. & Internationally)
- Number of **non-university participants** in those activities
- Amount of **external funding and in-kind support** generated for those activities

Reporting OEMI Data Results

Data from the OEMI allowed us to integrate quantitative data into national reports and to university administration. We reported the following:

- FTE and salary investment by the university
- Revenue produced for the university and partners
- Percentage of highly engaged activities across respondents, including those who had conducted needs assessment, participated in joint planning and assessment activities, and had sustainable projects or activities.
- Number who had created scholarly products and other forms of intellectual property in relation to work.

What We've Learned: Challenges

Definitions and Criteria

MSU's definition of outreach & engagement identifies it as a scholarly endeavor that cuts across research, teaching, and service; therefore it is impossible for us to separate engagement from other work.

Diverse concepts of engagement among faculty and others lead to a multitude of activities that are not easily captured and descriptively characterized.

Because of multiple purposes and audiences for the reports, it's difficult to determine what data to include or exclude.

Anecdotal evidence doesn't characterize a whole institution, particularly an institution the size and complexity of MSU.

“Hard evidence” needs to include university investment and revenues.

Empirical data, specifically quantitative, has the potential to allow more comparability across institutions.

Collecting data on the vast varieties of outreach and engagement (e.g. outreach research, outreach instruction, service-learning, public events) requires special provisions on such factors as attendance or time investment.

What We've Learned: Opportunities

Growing interest in measuring engagement has the potential to:

- Increase the visibility of engagement as an important function of research universities

- Provide evidence to the public that universities are engaged with constituents external to the university

- Lead to greater rewards for those involved in engagement activities.

- Provide universities a forum in which to discuss engagement

Greater levels of standardization across research universities would allow institutions a means by which to assess their engagement efforts.

Future Questions to Consider

In order to measure engagement accomplishments, research universities should consider the following:

What does it mean for a university to be engaged?

- How much activity constitutes an engaged institution?
- What characterizes these activities?
- Who should determine the definition of an engaged institution? (e.g. universities, external entities, etc.)

Future Questions to Consider

How is success as an engaged university measured?

- Should success be defined in relation to prior accomplishments, national standards, or something else?
- How do we determine success for both input (institutional commitment) and output (accomplishments)?
- What indicators can be developed that are not anecdotal? And how should these be measured to allow for aggregation at the institutional level?
- How important is quantity of activities vs. quality of these efforts?
- Can the criteria extend beyond a single institutional and/or across institutional types?