Carnegie's Community-Engagement Classification:

Intentions and Insights

BY AMY DRISCOLL

Despite our commitment to community engagement, we had not previously compiled information about the many types and examples of community engagement that occur here. The self-study tells us that we have much to celebrate. It also provides us with a tool for analyzing where we can further increase our efforts.
                    —A small private college in the Midwest

The Carnegie process is now informing university-wide strategic planning and is being turned into a set of recommendations. It has revitalized attention to the core urban mission of the institution and created widespread energy to deepen community engagement.
                    —A large urban university on the East coast

Over the last few years, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching has engaged in a comprehensive re-examination of its traditional classification system. The redesign stemmed from a concern about the inadequacy of the classification for representing institutional similarities and differences and its insensitivity to the evolution of higher education. In December 2006, the foundation announced the inaugural selection of 76 U. S. colleges and universities to be newly classified as "institutions of community engagement," the first of a set of elective classifications intended to broaden the categorization of colleges and universities. Of those 76 institutions, most reported the kind of impact described in the opening quotations. The enthusiastic response to the new classification signaled the eagerness of institutions to have their community engagement acknowledged with a national and publicly recognized classification.

THE DOCUMENTATION FRAMEWORK

Before the first formal classification began in 2006, extensive efforts were devoted to developing a framework that institutions could use to document engagement with their communities. That framework was designed to:

1) Respect the diversity of institutions and their approaches to community engagement;

2) Engage institutions in a process of inquiry, reflection, and self-assessment; and

Amy Driscoll is a consulting scholar with the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, where she coordinates the new elective classification for community engagement. Previously director of community/university partnerships at Portland State University, her publications include Making Outreach Visible: A Guide to Documenting Professional Service and Outreach *(1999), with Ernest Lynton.*

3) Honor institutions' achievements while promoting the ongoing development of their programs.

The development of the framework for this new classification occurred in three phases. The first consisted of consultation with national leaders and a review of the current literature on community engagement. The second phase was a review of current practices in documenting such engagement, such as those by Campus Compact, the Council of Independent Colleges (CIC), the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC), and individual institutions. The third phase of development was an ambitious and informative pilot study with 14 institutions that had been identified as significantly engaged with their communities. Representatives from those institutions reviewed and critiqued an initial framework, tested it on their campuses, and made significant contributions to the final design.

In order to respect the diversity of institutions and their approaches, the term "community engagement" was defined broadly as "the collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity." The documentation framework was also designed to accommodate institutional variations in philosophy, approaches, and contexts.

DOCUMENTATION PROCESS

Unlike Carnegie's other classifications, which rely on national data, its new, voluntary classifications such as community engagement are designed to work based on documentation provided by the institutions.

To engage colleges and universities in a substantive process of inquiry, reflection, and self-assessment, the framework has two major sections: *Foundational Indicators* and *Categories of Engagement*. Applicants were asked first to document a set of *Foundational Indicators* in two categories: "Institutional Identity and Culture" and "Institutional Commitment." These included both required and optional documentation. For example, one requirement of "Institutional Identity and Culture" was that "the institution indicates that community engagement is a priority in its mission" and provides relevant quotations from mission statements to demonstrate that priority, while the "Institutional Commitment" category required documentation regarding budget, infrastructure, strategic planning, and faculty-development efforts to support community engagement. Colleges and universities that were unable to meet the requirements of the first stage were encouraged to address these foundational indicators before seeking classification at a future date.

The second section of the documentation framework, *Categories of Engagement*, calls for data about, and examples and descriptions of, focused engagement activities in the categories of "Curricular Engagement" and "Outreach and Partnerships."

To demonstrate curricular engagement, institutions were asked to describe teaching, learning, and scholarly activities that engage faculty, students, and the community in mutually beneficial and respectful collaboration, address community-identified needs, deepen students' civic and academic learning, enhance the well-being of the community, and enrich the scholarship of the institution.

To demonstrate outreach and partnerships, they were asked to describe two related approaches to community engagement: first, the provision of institutional resources for community use in ways that benefited both the campus and the community and second, collaborations and faculty scholarship that constituted a beneficial exchange, exploration, discovery, and application of knowledge, information, and resources.

The requirements of both sections, when met, describe an institution deeply engaged with its community. The composite profile of these colleges and universities represents the best practices that have been identified nationally. The framework enabled participating institutions to assess the presence or absence of such practices, identify and reflect on both the strengths of and the gaps in their approaches, and strengthen their programs. Thus Carnegie began to achieve its intention to honor achievements while promoting ongoing improvement.

The Applicants

In April 2006, 145 institutions responded to the opportunity to be classified. Of them, 107 were accepted for the inaugural pool. They varied in size, type, programmatic focus, and location, and yet the pool was also limited enough to ensure a thorough and reflective review process. By the September 2006 deadline, 89 institutions had submitted full documentation. Those institutions that did not complete applications reported either that the documentation framework was more extensive than they had anticipated or that their approaches to community engagement needed further development before they could meet the requirements.

Responses from both the institutions that completed the application and those that did not affirmed that the process was substantive and required extensive reflection and self-assessment. In many cases, they reported that new questions and unexpected challenges arose as the framework asked them to describe areas of engagement that they had not previously assessed or even tracked on an institutional level.

A pivotal question for many campuses was how to define engagement for their institution and its community. Indiana University-Purdue University, Indianapolis, replaced "community engagement" with "civic engagement" to better reflect the institutional philosophy. North Carolina State University introduced its documentation with a broader definition of community than the Carnegie one, since campus/community discussions had expanded the concept of community beyond geographic boundaries.

In other cases, new tracking and assessment systems and strategies were developed and put into practice. For example,

Northern Kentucky University revised an existing annual survey to include elements of the classification framework, created an online version of the survey to strengthen an already strong response rate, and published the data in a well-disseminated institutional report.

Of the 76 colleges and universities that were finally recognized in the first classification, 44 are public institutions and 32 are private; 36 are classified (in Carnegie's "basic" classification) as doctorate-granting universities, 21 are master's colleges and universities, 13 are baccalaureate colleges, five are community colleges, and one has a specialized arts focus. Within and among those 76 institutions are varied approaches to engagement; diverse partnerships in terms of disciplinary focus, size, length of time, and purposes; and varying interpretations of community, both conceptually and geographically. Among them, five documented only a focus on curricular engagement, and nine focused their documentation on outreach and partnerships, while 62 institutions qualified for classification in both categories.

Insights from Institutions Newly Classified

One of the major strengths of the institutions that were classified as engaged with their communities was a compelling alignment of mission, marketing, leadership, traditions, recognitions, budgetary support, infrastructure, faculty development, and strategic plans—the foundational indicators of community engagement. For example, Portland State University's motto, "Let knowledge serve the city," was translated into budgetary priorities, an office of community/university partnerships, a consistent message from institutional leadership, and promotion and tenure guidelines that reward Boyer's "scholarship of application." Rhodes College's mission of "translating academic study and personal concern into effective leadership and action in their communities and the world" was enacted with a new student-orientation program ("Memphis Connection"), a common theme in its news releases, a set of strategic imperatives, and student awards and honors for leadership.

This kind of alignment is critical if a significant change in mission is to be sustained and should be the goal of institutions that are in the early phases of community engagement. Such alignment can also serve as the object of self-assessments as more-advanced institutions mark their progress and identify areas for improvement in their commitment to community engagement.

Strong documentation of curricular engagement began with carefully crafted definitions and processes for identifying and tracking activities such as service learning or community-based learning. Those definitions and processes were indicators of the kind of ongoing and substantive discussion that innovations demand if they are going to be successful and endure. Examples of faculty scholarship were further evidence of the institutionalization of community engagement and of its being embedded in faculty roles and rewards, rather than being an "add-on" to faculty responsibilities.

For example, the University of St. Thomas in Minneapolis-St. Paul began its documentation with an extended definition of service learning and described how the scholarship of engagement was integrated into undergraduate as well as doc-

toral research. The university listed more than 60 examples of faculty scholarship related to curricular engagement, including refereed journal publications, book chapters, conference presentations, grants, and videos.

Community engagement in the area of outreach and partnerships took multiple forms—cooperative education and extension coursework, learning centers, institutional resource-sharing (libraries, technology, and cultural offerings), student volunteerism, and professional-development centers. Institutions with strong and long-term partnerships presented compelling evidence that their operation entailed collaborative and multi-faceted relationships among faculty, staff, students, and community partners.

Partnerships are complex and require new understanding and skills. The University of Alaska's innovative approach to partnerships illustrates those challenges. The university approaches partnerships with a model of "generating knowledge and practice" in the community through a process of collaborative "identification of problems and issues, gathering background data, grappling with meaning, establishing action or methodology to proceed, reflecting and analyzing the outcomes, and disseminating the results." Faculty-community scholarship with collaborative authorship and a focus on community issues and practices then emerges out of this work.

CHALLENGES

The areas in which institutions struggled to provide documentation offer as much insight as do their areas of strength. Those struggles occurred in two areas: assessing the community's need for and perceptions of the institution's engagement and developing substantive roles for the community in creating the institution's plans for that engagement. One successful institution, Chandler-Gilbert Community College, gathered data about community perceptions with a comprehensive approach that included a survey of community representatives, presidential meetings with community leaders, feedback from a community advisory council, a program-review process that probed community satisfaction, and databases that consistently recorded community/college activities and assessment information. The college reported that information from all these sources was used for planning and decision-making.

But most institutions could only describe in vague generalities how they had achieved genuine reciprocity with their communities. Again, community involvement requires new understanding, new skills, and even a different way of conceptualizing community. There are generally significant barriers left over from both internal and external perceptions of the campus as an "ivory tower," and those barriers must be addressed for authentic community partnerships to develop.

Another challenge for institutions was the assessment of community engagement in general and of the specific categories of engagement in particular. Strategies ranged from the simple recording and tracking of engagement activities to the assessment of student learning, community benefits, and other outcomes. But only six institutions could be specific about institution-wide student-learning outcomes resulting from community engagement. One such institution, California State University, Monterey Bay, has a well-crafted set of learning outcomes related to community engagement that all students meet as part of their general-education requirements, as well as related civic-learning outcomes in each of the major programs of study.

A small minority of institutions maintain systems of institutional assessment, but most institutions rely on data from individual faculty projects, from course assessments, and occasionally from departmental reviews to evaluate their community-engagement approaches. Assessment in general has made less-than-satisfactory progress at most institutions, so it is not surprising that this indicator would be particularly challenging. But it is essential to conduct effective assessment to show that the extensive resources and time commitments required by community engagement are directed effectively, as well as to improve those engagement efforts.

A final challenge is the lack of significant support for faculty who are engaged in this work. Although all institutions reported some faculty-development support in the form of workshops, seminars, conference travel, and mini-grants, few documented that community engagement was a priority in their faculty recruitment and hiring practices. There were, however, exceptions: Rutgers University-Newark, for example, emphasizes professional work in its urban context—teaching and research focused on urban issues—in recruitment materials.

Even fewer institutions described changes in the recognition and reward system for promotion and tenure. Exceptions included Kent State University, with Boyer's scholarship of application recognized explicitly in its promotion and tenure guidelines, and Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University's community-related scholarship examples, which include "outreach publications, presentations to community groups, and consulting."

In contrast, most institutions continue to place community engagement and its scholarship in the traditional category of service and require other forms of scholarship for promotion and tenure. Changes in long-standing traditions are not easily achieved, and the data from the newly classified institutions nudge us to accelerate efforts to this end.

All these areas of challenge offer insights to 2008 applicants for the new classification. They spotlight the work yet to be accomplished and call for increased attention to strategies for change.

CONCLUSION

The new elective classification for institutions that are engaged with their communities is an exciting move in Carnegie's extension and refinement of its classification of colleges and universities. The classification framework for community engagement has achieved its intention: to respect the diversity of institutional contexts and approaches to engagement, to encourage a reflective inquiry and self-assessment process that is practical and provides useful data, and to affirm good work while urging even better. The documentation process motivated institutions—even those with strong and deep commitments to community engagement—to develop and institutionalize their tracking and assessment systems and to engage with their communities in authentic reciprocal relationships. The national recognition accompanying the new classification thus has enhanced both the prominence and promise of community engagement in higher education. ⊆