Guest Editorial

Public Engagement and Emerging Roles for Institutional Advancement

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Guest editor's notes:

I have a growing conviction that what is needed [for higher education] is not just more programs, but a larger purpose, a larger sense of mission, a larger clarity of direction in the nation's life. (Ernest Boyer, Former President, Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1996)

Ernest Boyer's statement made over a decade ago reflected a national sentiment during the 1990s that US colleges and universities had drifted away from their civic responsibilities. No longer was higher education seen as the primary vehicle to address important national issues such as poverty, racism, and other social ills. On the contrary, higher education institutions were increasingly viewed as insular and ill equipped to address societal needs.

This crisis of public perception inspired a group of higher education leaders to convene a series of national dialogues regarding the civic roles of colleges and universities. Forums such as the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant

Universities birthed a new philosophy and a new term—public engagement—to define a different kind of relationship between higher education and society. Public engagement soon came to be understood as an interactive process where institutions and external partners exchange perspectives, materials, and resources to bring about positive social change. The signature elements of engagement are reciprocity and mutual benefit, contrasted with traditional “one-way” models of outreach that often failed to take into account community needs.

The national movement toward engagement between higher education and the communities they serve has gained momentum since Boyer's statement in 1996. In 1999, the Wingspread Declaration on Civic Engagement united a group of college and university presidents to express civic engagement as a core mission within their institutions. National organizations such as Campus Compact have grown rapidly to promote civic engagement among a diverse set of institutions. In 2006, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching introduced

a new classification of “community engaged institutions” that define colleges and universities by their commitment to public engagement. Finally, national accrediting organizations such as the North Central Association are beginning to incorporate engagement into their criteria for accreditation.

The national movement toward public engagement has profound implications for changes in institutional culture, structure, policy, and the overall philosophy of higher education in the United States. A growing body of literature addresses how institutions are seeking to transform reward systems, organizational structures, and faculty culture to adopt an engagement agenda. Noticeably absent from the literature on public engagement is the role that institutional advancement offices might play in this emerging context. Simply put, no map exists to help advancement leaders conceptualize advancement practices and opportunities in this new environment. This special issue of the *International Journal of Educational Advancement* aims to fill this gap.

For the purposes of this special issue, we limit our examination of institutional advancement and public engagement to four-year public colleges and universities in the United States. Our scope is limited for three reasons. First, state institutions in the US were chartered to serve public interests and thus are explicitly linked to addressing economic and civic purposes. As such, these institutions are accountable to a broad set of stakeholders including public officials, families, taxpayers, and the general public. The authors’ examination of engagement is developed with these stakeholders in mind.

Second, past literature suggests that a gap between potential and opportunity for advancement and public engagement may be largest at public institutions. For example, the 2004 Campus Compact report entitled, *The Service and Service-Learning Center Guide to Endowed Funding*, suggests that private institutions have led the way in generating large gifts for community engagement programs and in developing “engaged” approaches to advancement. Alternatively, our special issue focuses on unique opportunities afforded to public institutions in this context.

The third reason for limiting our analysis to public colleges and universities is a practical one. A tightened focus on four-year public institutions allows for a fuller treatment of a unique sector of higher education among a very diverse US postsecondary education system. Instead, the contributors to this issue suggest that future issues of the *International Journal of Educational Advancement* consider the topic in different institutional contexts. For example, an examination of public engagement and advancement in the community college sector would greatly benefit leaders of two-year institutions as they increasingly turn to private sources of revenue to support their work. Still, other special issues might explore the historic connections between philanthropy and community engagement at private colleges and universities in the US. Finally, it would be instructive to gain insights from European institutions and their attempts to bring together public engagement and institutional advancement practices.

Outline of this Issue

The contributors to this special issue possess unique sets of perspectives and backgrounds relevant to engagement and advancement at public four-year institutions. As a result, the authors also draw on diverse ways of knowing—through theory, research, and observation—to gain an understanding of the “what, how, and why” associated with adopting a public engagement philosophy of advancement at state colleges and universities. For this reason, both theoretical and applied pieces appear in this issue.

Our special issue begins by laying the groundwork for a collective understanding of public engagement and its relationship to institutional advancement. As issue editor, I launch this discussion by articulating introductory concepts, a theoretical framework, and key questions that inform this topic. Questions addressed in my opening article include: “What is public engagement and why is it important? What are the implications of public engagement for the practice of institutional advancement? What might institutional advancement look like at an ‘engaged’ institution? What are the challenges and opportunities for adopting an engagement model of advancement at public colleges and universities?”

Article two, authored by Shelley Strickland from the University of Michigan, builds on these introductory concepts by discussing underlying motivations for philanthropy and its relationship to public engagement. Through an extensive literature review, Strickland outlines the history of philanthropy in the US and the motivations for major gifts to higher

education institutions. In so doing, she makes the case that today’s transformational donors are interested in building communities, and that colleges and universities may be viewed as mechanisms for facilitating social change. In this case, community engagement might be regarded as a compelling strategy to reach future generations of higher education donors.

The third article, authored by Mark Langseth and Cassie McVeety from Portland State University (PSU), reflects on practical ways in which public engagement can ignite and expand major gift opportunities for public colleges and universities. Drawing on their experiences at PSU, the authors discuss how public engagement is becoming an organizing principle for institutional advancement operations within that institution. The authors suggest ways in which public engagement can sharpen both institutional identity and strategic directions for advancement offices.

In article four, Victor Bloomfield and Michelle Wittcoff Kuhl discuss the challenges and opportunities for public engagement and institutional advancement at major research universities. Specifically, the authors provide a personal account of how public engagement is being considered as a means to advance graduate education, health sciences, and the STEM disciplines (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) at the University of Minnesota (UM). Drawing on their own observations and conversations with UM development officers, the authors provide practical suggestions on how to enhance disciplinary science while better serving societal needs.

Article five considers engagement from the broader perspective of institutional identity. Specifically, Jay Blanton, executive director for public relations and marketing at the University of Kentucky (UK), examines how institutions brand engagement as a way to strengthen an institution's strategic and fiscal position. Through a case study analysis of UK, Blanton concludes that successful branding and marketing of engagement efforts require an alignment of resources within the campus, and must be focused on an integrated strategic message.

Finally, article six authored by John Burkhardt from the University of Michigan, provides reflections on what has been learned in this special issue. In this article, he identifies collaborative opportunities for public

engagement and institutional advancement and poses future directions for scholarship and dialogue surrounding these issues.

Through research, reflection on professional experiences, and analysis of traditional and emerging advancement practices, authors challenge conventional models of institutional advancement and consider a new course for advancement that is embedded in public engagement. Together, we aim to start a national conversation about the role of advancement professionals in fulfilling Boyer's vision of expanding higher education's role in serving society.

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