

The Engaged University: Reorganizing to Serve the Public Good

By Theodore R. Alter and Patricia A. Book

Abstract

This paper focuses on the current structure and processes at Penn State designed to enhance and unify the efforts to link the university's resources to the communities it serves to help solve the complex problems facing today's society. The authors discuss the present dialogue within a major research university on issues related to the "engaged institution" and report on the progress of several faculty groups that support faculty involvement in outreach activities.

In this paper, we provide an example of how one land-grant institution, Penn State University, has approached re-engagement for the purpose of serving the public good. We discuss the University's commitment to outreach, with examples of what we are doing to serve the public good; describe the principles and organizational structures that strengthen outreach; and outline the organizational change process that has guided our efforts and continues to do so at Penn State. The ongoing challenges of engaging faculty in outreach activities, and the measures undertaken to motivate and encourage that involvement, is of critical importance to our effort and will be the central focus of this discussion.

Commitment to Engagement

Penn State became a land-grant institution in 1863, grounded in the philosophy that education should be provided to all men and women regardless of their socio-economic status. Currently, land-grant and other public institutions of higher education are being called upon to renew and expand their engagement with the communities they serve.

Penn State President Graham Spanier chaired the Kellogg Presidents' Commission that released an important document entitled *Returning to Our Roots: The Engaged Institution*. The Presidents' Commission report recognizes that "One challenge we face is growing public frustration with what is seen to be our unresponsiveness. At the root of the criticism is a perception that we are out of touch and out of date. Another part of the issue is that although society has problems, our institutions have 'disciplines.' In the end, what these complaints add up to is a perception that, despite the resources and

expertise available on our campuses, our institutions are not well organized to bring them to bear on local problems in a coherent way” (Kellogg 1999).

Engagement means, the Presidents’ Commission notes, that institutions must “redesign their teaching, research, and service functions to become more sympathetically and productively involved with their communities.” The engagement ideal is profoundly different from our inherited idea of a one-way process of transferring knowledge and technology from the university to key constituents. By engagement, the Commission envisions partnerships, two-way streets defined by mutual respect, sharing, and reciprocity among the partners for what each brings to the table (Kellogg 1999).

Penn State’s response to the renewed interest in engagement began early, with the Faculty Senate’s work on including outreach activities in promotion and tenure guidelines in 1995. This was followed by President Graham Spanier’s 1996 announcement of the University’s plan for strengthening Outreach and Cooperative Extension. “The purpose of this plan was to use the strengths of Cooperative Extension, Continuing Education, Distance Education, Public Broadcasting, and other major outreach units of the University such as Technology Transfer to expand outreach programs and services through increased communication, coordination, collaboration, and enhanced partnerships with all the academic colleges” (Penn State 2000). Responding to local and community needs was always the goal of Cooperative Extension, housed in the College of Agricultural Sciences, with strong outreach to the agricultural community. The change agenda in this case was to broaden the involvement of all academic colleges in support of the Cooperative Extension and Outreach mission. Comprehensive involvement in engagement is perceived as a new idea for land-grants who have become research universities and moving in this direction is seen as a challenging break from more recent tradition.

Examples of Serving the Public Good

Examples abound across the University of the projects and programs that illustrate this engagement ideal and the University’s motto “Making Life Better” for the citizens of Pennsylvania. Examples resulting from the reorganization of outreach at Penn State and the University’s renewed commitment illustrate activities that have been developed across outreach units, represent multidisciplinary projects with academic colleges, demonstrate collaborative relationships with communities, and reflect reciprocal relationships that include resource sharing and funding.

One example is Food Safety Training that was developed and implemented through a partnership between Penn State’s Cooperative Extension and Continuing Education programs to train food service personnel in preparation for the implementation of the Pennsylvania Food Employee Certification Act. Another partnership between Penn State’s College of Engineering and Cooperative Extension focuses on water quality issues in both small community water systems and decentralized, on-lot septic systems.

An example of a multidisciplinary effort is the Rural Women's Health Initiative developed collaboratively by the College of Health and Human Development, the Penn State College of Medicine, the College of Agricultural Sciences, Continuing Education, and Cooperative Extension. Many examples of faculty engagement in outreach activities can be found in the *Penn State Outreach* magazine (Outreach 2000) and the annual updates on the University's Plan for Strengthening Outreach and Cooperative Extension (Penn State 1998, 1999, 2000).

Engagement Principles

Fundamental principles guiding Penn State's Outreach and Cooperative Extension initiative include the view that Outreach is not synonymous with service, but a key component of all three missions of the land-grant institution: teaching, research, and service. At Penn State, "outreach teaching, outreach research, and outreach service" are referenced in faculty promotion and tenure guidelines permitting faculty to document this work under all three of these areas of scholarship. Other principles include the following: it is expected that outreach should be a part of every academic unit's mission and strategic plan; however, it is not necessary for every individual faculty member to participate in outreach. Faculty need to be prepared and supported to effectively engage in outreach scholarship with external audiences. The integrated Outreach and Cooperative Extension organization is seen as a critical support for faculty engagement work. Outreach activities of faculty must be rewarded and recognized appropriately. Recognition in the promotion and tenure process is essential as are other means of recognition, including annual merit reviews, national and international visibility in University publications, and annual university outreach awards.

The essential work of the University revolves around knowledge creation, preservation, dissemination, and application; thus, enriching and sharing knowledge serves as the primary focus of University outreach initiatives. Outreach involves a reciprocal teaching/learning process, and the University has as much to gain from these activities as the individuals or communities we serve. Outreach units should provide a single point of entry and access to all the knowledge resources of the University. Therefore, communication, coordination, and collaboration among all outreach units of the University must be expanded and enhanced. Outreach initiatives should be relevant and responsive to client and community needs, should support the diversity goals of the University, and should actively engage students so as to increase learning and help them connect theory to practice. Ultimately, Outreach should expand and enhance constituency support.

These principles provide the foundation for and have guided the reorganization of Outreach and Cooperative Extension at Penn State. The original Plan to Strengthen Outreach and Cooperative Extension (Penn State 1996) redefined the role of the senior officer for outreach and created a new title—Vice President for Outreach and Cooperative Extension—to provide for stronger advocacy, coordination, and leadership for outreach and extension activities. A Director of Cooperative Extension was appointed. A joint responsibility was created for the administration of Cooperative Extension

between the Vice President for Outreach and Cooperative Extension and the Dean of Agricultural Sciences. The titles of the Assistant/Associate Dean for Continuing and Distance Education in each college of the University were changed to be consistent with the title of the Vice President for Outreach and Cooperative Extension and to broaden their responsibilities to include extension liaison and coordination in each college.

Other organizational changes included establishing a Coordinating Council for Outreach and Cooperative Extension to enhance University-wide policy and program development and coordination. Eight Regional Councils for Outreach and Cooperative Extension were created to enhance communication, cooperation, and collaboration among key Penn State units involved in outreach and extension.

These “integrating mechanisms” were institutionalized across the university to symbolically and operationally establish Outreach and Cooperative Extension as central to the vision and work of the whole university. The mechanisms are an essential part of the permanent organizational infrastructure and ongoing processes that support and structure organizational conversation, and individual and organizational learning, about Outreach and Cooperative Extension at Penn State.

In addition to these principles that undergird our change process, we have been guided by a theory of how organizations change. A theoretical perspective has been helpful in framing the need for change and for selecting certain strategies and actions to foster the change process.

Our Theory of Organizational Change

Every organizational transformation starts with a movement that embraces a particular notion or theory of change. That theory is typically not obvious to the individuals in the organization, nor its stakeholders. However, in the case of the Outreach and Cooperative Extension initiative at Penn State, we did think deliberately and explicitly about a theory of change in developing and implementing the initiative.

The core elements of our theory of change include the following: Organizational transformation is grounded in the understanding and behavior of individuals (Smith 1996). Some changes in organizational life do not require individual behavior change. However, changing the inter-organizational relationships among all the outreach enterprises and all colleges across a major research university like Penn State requires significant, substantive behavioral change on the part of many individuals: faculty, administrators, support staff, and field-based outreach educators. We knew we needed to pay attention to this factor if we were to succeed. If we did not, we would surely fail, as have many public and private sector organizational transformations where the importance of individual understanding and behavioral change received short shrift.

Individual behavioral change occurs through the process of individuals learning about the change, and what it means for them as individuals in the organization and their

work in the organization. It means learning what a change means for the work unit of which an individual is a part. “When organizational performance depends on new behavior and skills, only people can make it happen by changing the way they work. New designs, especially those that articulate a different vision for how work gets done, can inspire people to take responsibility for change” (Smith 1996). Adopting new organizational behaviors is successful when individuals connect personally and emotionally with the rationale and purpose of the changes (Austin 2000).

This individual learning is important because it is through individual learning, cumulative across individuals, that collective, organizational learning occurs. Organizational learning means evolving new ways of relating to others, internal and external to the organization. It means shifts in the way organizational business is structured and conducted. It means change in the cultural and behavioral norms and values of the organization. It means, and requires, individual and collective behavioral change (Schon 1983).

Our Change Process

In this context, given our theory, our challenge was to design and implement a process to foster individual and organizational learning, allowing Penn State to move aggressively toward its vision of expanding and enhancing our engagement with people, communities, businesses, and governments throughout Pennsylvania and becoming a national and international leader in university Outreach and Cooperative Extension. It was imperative that the process provide a context for quality interaction, and thus quality learning and lasting change in organizational norms, commitments, and ways of doing business.

As DiBella and Nevis (1998) note, there are three essential elements for organizational learning. “First, new skills, attitudes, values, and behaviors are created or acquired over time. Second, what is learned becomes the property of some collective unit. Third, what is learned remains within the organization or group even if individuals leave.” Our challenge, then, was, is, and will be—since the learning process with respect to Penn State’s Outreach and Cooperative Extension initiative is on-going and ever-evolving—to establish and nurture an effective, quality interactive learning process that allows, over time, achievement of these three essential elements.

Key facilitating factors to foster organizational change are commitment over time to reflection, learning, adjustment, and adaptation in the change process design. Other important facilitating factors include providing a vision of how to move through the change process itself, in addition to a vision of in what ways and why the organization should change (Smith 1996). We laid out change process principles and activities early on, and repeatedly articulated that process vision. We systematically created regular and multiple small and large-scale opportunities for individuals to learn about the Outreach and Cooperative Extension initiative. These events were designed for individual learning and group discussion and to enhance interactive and organizational learning.

For a change strategy to succeed, it must continually increase the number of people taking responsibility for change (Smith 1996). The many learning opportunities created were essential in helping bring people on board. It typically goes slower at the start, with numbers increasing over time as the momentum for change builds.

Establishing a systematic organizational communication strategy is very important. A significant, substantive part of that strategy is opportunity for discussion and learning. Another significant, substantive part involves widespread, constant articulation of the organizational vision and values associated with the organizational change initiative. These communication activities need to be integrated seamlessly with communication initiatives and leaders throughout the organization.

Commitment on the part of change leaders to listening, reflection, learning, and adaptation is critical for success. Such leadership behavior is important not only with respect to the vision of the change process itself, but most importantly, it is critical to shaping the organizational vision for change, specifically the more detailed organizational arrangements emanating from that vision. Change leaders must live the change. Modeling change behavior, in words and deeds, gives a powerful message, inspiring confidence in and commitment to the articulated vision (Smith 1996).

All of these integrating mechanisms and facilitating factors have created incredible synergy and energy among campus and field-based faculty, outreach educators, support staff, university administrators, and other university stakeholders. The result has been to inspire new partnerships within the University and with external stakeholders, as well as multi-college initiatives, creative new programs, and conferences addressing cutting-edge needs. The change has created excitement, and in many cases, a curiosity and desire to explore previously unrecognized mutual interests in order to work together. At the core of these efforts, however, is the ongoing commitment of faculty to participate in outreach activities.

Faculty Involvement in the Engaged University: Valuing Outreach and Engagement

The organizational restructuring described above is part of the dynamic of change underlying Penn State's direction as an engaged institution. Faculty are central to the engagement process as it is their discovery of knowledge that provides the fuel for the dissemination and application processes of outreach. Changing the culture of a research university to one in which outreach activities and resident teaching are highly valued and where faculty are recognized and rewarded for these activities is challenging. It requires vision, leadership, an understanding of the change process, and a dialogue among faculty about the meaning of scholarship across the core land-grant missions of teaching, research, and service.

A first step in the change process at Penn State occurred through a 1995 joint report of the Council on University Outreach and the Faculty Senate Committee on Outreach

Activities. The report defined outreach as a form of scholarship which is embodied in the teaching, research, and service missions of the University. The report also noted the benefits to faculty of involvement in outreach activities: outreach enriches teaching; opens new lines of inquiry for research; enriches understanding of the implications of individual scholarship on society; expands possibilities for faculty visibility, research opportunities, support, and consulting; creates new friends for the University for fundraising and support; provides the opportunity for undergraduate and graduate students to gain practical experience and apply newly acquired knowledge and skill; and enhances Penn State's stature in the commonwealth, the nation, and the world.

The Senate Committee on Outreach Activities furthered the vision by recommending to the Faculty Senate that they establish a mechanism to recognize faculty involvement in outreach activities. Of greatest significance are the modifications made in 1995 to the University's faculty promotion and tenure guidelines. The modifications explicitly allow for the documentation of outreach activities to be included in all forms of faculty scholarship (teaching ability and effectiveness; research, creative accomplishments and scholarship; and service to the university and the public), rather than equating outreach with the service category.

In establishing the standing Senate Committee on Outreach Activities in 1994, the Faculty Senate recognized early on the growing importance of engagement and faculty involvement in outreach activities. The committee was charged to recommend ways to enhance the activity of Penn State faculty in outreach in all its types. The ongoing work of this committee, which includes representation from the outreach units of the University but is predominantly composed of faculty, involves informational and legislative reports to the Faculty Senate. The most recent legislative report developed by the Committee and approved by the Senate recommends refining and strengthening the recognition and reward system for outreach at Penn State, and encourages the University to "develop assessment models of scholarship to recognize better the breadth and value of outreach activities at all levels of review across colleges and departments" (Faculty Senate Record 2001).

Coupled with the work of the Senate Committee on Outreach Activities was a parallel initiative among a group of faculty who formed a learning community to discuss the concept of outreach scholarship as reflected in the scholarship of teaching, research, and service. In 1998, the group called UniSCOPE—University Scholarship and Criteria for Outreach and Performance Evaluation—began a dialogue focused on recognizing and documenting outreach scholarship in the University.

UniSCOPE's recently published report, *UniSCOPE 2000: A Multidimensional Model of Scholarship for the 21st Century*, is a creative and well-articulated model that provides a foundation for further dialogue within the University community at Penn State and nationally about a broadened definition of scholarship that includes outreach activities within the teaching, research, and service continuums (Kellogg 1999). Presently, Penn State's Faculty Senate Committee on Outreach Activities and the Senate Faculty Affairs

Committee are collaborating to further the Faculty Senate's discussion of ideas generated by UniSCOPE, which indicates the attention that engagement and outreach activities of faculty are receiving at Penn State. The University's outreach leadership is actively sponsoring, supporting, encouraging, and participating in these faculty conversations.

It is important to recognize that the change process as articulated here takes time. The policies developed and adopted by the Faculty Senate at Penn State have been under discussion and development over a six-year period. The learning community of faculty undertook two years of study to develop their understanding of outreach scholarship and derive recommendations that imbed these activities within a broadened definition of scholarship.

Senior faculty leaders who serve as associate deans for outreach in their respective colleges are also critically engaged in conversations about how to support faculty outreach activities. These associate deans, along with the outreach leadership, sit on an advisory policy body to the Vice President for Outreach and Cooperative Extension noted earlier as the Coordinating Council for Outreach and Cooperative Extension (CCOCE). This university-wide group is committed to ensuring the academic quality of all outreach activities and fostering reward and recognition for faculty involvement in outreach activities. CCOCE also provides a forum for discussions among the academic community and the outreach units on policy issues and program development viewed as critical to advancing the University's engagement agenda. The chair of the Faculty Senate Committee on Outreach Activities sits on COCCE, and the two groups hold an annual joint retreat.

Financial Incentives

While secondary to the key issues of faculty recognition and reward, Penn State has considered several financial incentives for colleges and their faculty to become more involved in outreach activities. Basically, these financial incentives move beyond the standard "extra-compensation" model typical of continuing education practices of the past. Both the sponsoring college and individual faculty are considered partners with the outreach units in developing and delivering outreach programs. The partnership provides financial reward to the college for the level of outreach activity by providing a "base support" funding allocation based on gross revenues generated from continuing and distance programs offered through these outreach units. In addition, colleges, departments, and faculty are rewarded through revenue sharing on those programs that generate excess revenues over expenses with the lion's share of net revenues going to the colleges.

Other strategies to encourage faculty involvement include seed funding and funding of faculty positions and activities in support of outreach. Seed funding through the Outreach and Cooperative Extension Program Innovation Fund is provided to faculty on a request for proposal basis to stimulate innovation, create new models, develop new audiences, and in general to reduce the financial risk of new outreach activities gener-

ated by faculty interest. The goal is to increase outreach programming to benefit Pennsylvania citizens, organizations, and communities.

Additionally, Cooperative Extension has begun funding of faculty positions in colleges other than Agricultural Sciences to expand the capacity of other colleges, such as Earth and Mineral Sciences, Engineering, and Health and Human Development, to support the educational programming of extension agents in counties across the Commonwealth.

Central Program Development and Marketing Services

To support increased faculty outreach activities, a central program development and marketing group was formed early in the organizational restructuring process. This centralized group has breadth and depth of competency in advertising, marketing research, sales, and program design. The responsibility of this group is to identify external educational needs, to support faculty in organizing effective learning environments for part-time students, to market the resulting programs effectively, and to support the overall delivery of programs to students through the full range of delivery mechanisms—on-site, on-line, face-to-face, or through television broadcasts.

Faculty Recognition

An important strategy to foster faculty culture change has been to publicly recognize faculty for their outreach contributions. The underlying principle is that faculty will be more influenced by recognition for the work of faculty peers who they respect than by administrative proclamations. *Penn State Outreach: Making Life Better*, a magazine published several times each year by Penn State's Outreach and Cooperative Extension, has become a well-respected vehicle for recognizing the outreach activities of faculty and staff across the University.

Finally, CCOCE has established a university faculty award for outreach, carrying a \$1,000 stipend, and on par with the University's teaching and research awards, to recognize faculty for outstanding outreach programming. Faculty members nominated for this award who have extended their scholarship to external constituents resulting in significant outcomes are honored at the annual University Awards Convocation, a dinner of faculty outreach scholars. Their work is featured in an issue of the *Penn State Outreach* magazine.

Commitment and Engagement

The story of the Outreach and Cooperative Extension initiative at Penn State is an ongoing experience in leadership and organizational transformation. The lessons we have learned include: (1) change takes time as internal outreach faculty and staff need time to learn more about each other; (2) it is critical to find formal mechanisms that foster learning and collaboration across the broader outreach organization; (3) it is important

to celebrate and to give visibility to the successes along the way; and (4) faculty culture and views on how outreach activities fit within scholarship are critical in the change process.

Outreach is an integral, vital component of Penn State's commitment and mission, and further strengthens the University's vision to become an indispensable resource for the people of Pennsylvania. Penn State is taking the "engaged university" concept seriously. Penn State's vision of re-engagement is grounded in the support of strong, integrated partnerships across the outreach units of the University working hand-in-hand with academic colleges and faculty in outreach efforts. The outreach partnership at Penn State, a collaboration among equals, is based on a theory of organizational change that values people and invests in their collective learning. In the long run, we believe this strategy will strengthen Penn State's outreach effort and redefine us as a re-engaged institution.

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