

Engaged Faculty at the University of New Hampshire: The Outreach Scholars Academy

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Abstract

Faculty development has been identified as a means of enhancing the ability of faculty members at higher education institutions to conduct scholarly engagement with community partners. The University of New Hampshire developed a semester-long Outreach Scholars Academy to help faculty partner with key external stakeholders in conducting research that will benefit the public and to enhance an engagement ethos across the campus. Faculty were selected through a competitive nomination and selection process. The outreach scholars work to learn and apply concepts of engagement through lectures, case studies, panel discussions, and reflection about their own project work. This program is supported by a national expert, engaged faculty experts, coaches, and the use of critical friends. Results indicate that faculty have gained a greater understanding of how to work with external and community partners, conduct scholarly research, and communicate their work to others as a scholarly endeavor.

Introduction

During the last decade there has been a call to enhance higher education's partnership with the society it serves (Byrne 2006). A few national organizations and scholars have had a major impact on defining engagement and outreach scholarship in the academy. Among the scholars was Ernest Boyer, whose seminal work, *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate* (1990), suggests scholarship be more broadly defined to include not only discovery, but also integration, application, and teaching. Leading the way among national organizations, the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC) through the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities calls for institutions to become more "engaged" with their external communities. In *Returning to our Roots: The Engaged Institution* the Kellogg Commission (1999) made five recommendations to help advance

institutional engagement: (1) engagement must become a central part of the institutional mission; (2) a systematic engagement plan must be developed; (3) interdisciplinary scholarship, research, and teaching should be encouraged; (4) academic leaders should provide incentives for faculty involvement in engagement; and (5) stable funding to support the engagement plan must be secured.

In addition to NASULGC, the Johnson Foundation hosted higher education leaders in a series of think tanks at meetings now

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known as the Wingspread Conferences. These conferences have produced a series of reports, including *Calling the Question: Is Higher Education Ready to Commit to Community Engagement?* (Brukardt et al. 2004). This report asks university presidents and chancellors, deans and department chairs, faculty and community partners, “Are universities ready to commit to engagement?” It suggests six promising practices higher education may adopt to institutionalize

engagement, one of which is recruiting and supporting “champions” of engagement. In a follow-up report, NASULGC and the Kellogg Commission (2006) surveyed thirty-five presidents, chancellors, and friends of public higher education. Five years after the Kellogg Commission’s final meeting, all survey respondents reported that significant change was under way at their universities in the areas of engagement.

Perhaps the most noteworthy impact on engagement will result from the current work of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. Carnegie, the principal organization that classifies higher education institutions, in 2006 (and for the first time) included an elective classification for “community engagement.” The Carnegie designation “engaged institution” results from a rigorous application, evaluation, and review process.

One of the indicators for the Carnegie classification for community engagement is faculty professional development focused on engagement. Professional development can enhance faculty members’ abilities to work with partnerships in a mutually beneficial way to address societal needs. While some faculty are able to develop those partnerships with ease, many others benefit from explicitly exploring the realities and opportunities of working with external partners in a true partnership. In response to this observed

need, we developed a semester-long professional development academy for University of New Hampshire faculty called “The Outreach Scholars Academy.” This article includes a brief summary of the context and history of engagement at the University of New Hampshire, an overview of the goals of the academy, a thorough description of its activities, and a record of its impact on the faculty who participated. We present this model of faculty professional development in engagement in the hope that other universities and colleges will be able to adopt it and adapt it to other institutional contexts.

Context for Outreach Scholarship at UNH

The University of New Hampshire (UNH) is a land-, sea-, and space-grant research institution with more than 600 tenure-track, extension, and research faculty. UNH, the state’s flagship public university, has responded to the challenge to be an engaged university by articulating the value of engagement in its most recent academic strategic plan. Further, “engagement through research and scholarship” was identified as one of three major areas of emphasis (in addition to institutional effectiveness and the undergraduate experience) in our most recent decennial regional accreditation process. In collaboration with an advisory board of faculty and other key institutional leaders, a definition for engagement at the University of New Hampshire was developed: *Engagement through research and scholarship is a mutually beneficial collaboration between the University of New Hampshire and community partners for the purpose of generating and applying relevant knowledge to directly benefit the public.*

With academic and accreditation plans in place, key considerations then became:

- a. How do we move forward from planning to action?
- b. How do we remain aware of the recommendations of the Kellogg Commission and other key leadership organizations? and
- c. How do our implementation steps reflect the current scholarship on how to engage faculty in the engagement mission?

Tierney (2004) notes that one of the greatest barriers to faculty members’ engaging in outreach work is the perceived lack of recognition and reward, particularly through the promotion and tenure process. Initially, changes to the UNH promotion and

tenure system to include language that supported engagement were discussed. However, after careful consideration and information gathering, we adopted a more grassroots approach. Consequently, a faculty development program—the “UNH Outreach Scholars Academy”—was developed as a means to enhance buy-in, reward and acknowledge faculty participation, increase faculty knowledge, and improve faculty capacity and motivation to conduct scholarly engagement. In naming the academy, we decided to use the term “outreach scholar” because our faculty found this term more accessible than “engagement.” We hoped that if fifty or sixty faculty members across the university completed the academy, they would influence their departments to adopt or recognize the importance of outreach scholarship on campus.

Overview and Goals of the Academy

The University of New Hampshire’s Outreach Scholars Academy was initiated in 2004; in three years, forty-eight faculty scholars have completed the academy. Designed around a successful leadership development model at Virginia Commonwealth University and innovative educational models, the academy strives to enhance faculty success in engagement within the disciplines by providing both theoretical and practical understanding of engagement and outreach scholarship. This is accomplished through a series of lectures and panel discussions; case study work to evaluate and document high-quality engaged scholarship; presentations by experts from federal agencies and foundations; encouraging of interdisciplinary discourse; and developing expertise in their discipline by working on collaborative projects. Brukardt and others (2004) suggested the importance of identifying champions of engagement to support and encourage other faculty (particularly younger) as they develop and implement projects with community partners. Intrigued by the idea, we sought to thread it throughout the academy.

Key to the success of the academy is a team approach. We believe that this program can succeed at other institutions only if supported by a leadership and operational team with the necessary financial resources. The authors of this article serve as that team for the UNH Outreach Scholars Academy, although over time each member has played somewhat different roles. Abrams and Williams conceptualized the initial academy model, serve as team coaches, and provide ongoing leadership in collaboration with the provost and the vice president for research to identify the financial resources required to sponsor, execute, and sustain the program.

Sandmann has had an ongoing relationship with UNH, beginning with her consultation for the UNH accreditation-focused self-study on “engagement through research and scholarship.” She works closely with Abrams and Williams to plan and implement multiple aspects of the program and also serves as the primary external expert providing a national perspective and national voice about engaged scholarship. Townson provides leadership for the program’s ongoing evaluation, serves as a team coach, and has worked closely with Abrams to help manage a variety of the program’s operations. She and Williams are also leading the development of the updated academy Web site. A number of other faculty and external experts have also assisted the team as coaches, panelists, and presenters.

The goals of the academy have been refined over the past three years and are currently as follows:

- Enhance individual faculty members’ ability to move forward from outreach/service to peer-reviewed outreach scholarship through
 - focused conversations about “best practices” in outreach scholarship and
 - critical review and application of these practices to their own scholarship
- Increase faculty knowledge about developing *mutually beneficial partnerships* with those external to the university so that scholarship will be enhanced
- Contextualize national conversations about outreach scholarship to UNH and develop a common understanding of this form of scholarship within the disciplines
- Implement and advance the outreach and engagement goals articulated in the Academic Strategic Plan and the New England Association of Schools and Colleges accreditation self-study

Description of the Academy

Recruitment: Recruiting the right faculty for the academy is extremely important. This includes selecting faculty from various disciplines and at different stages of their careers. Much of the curriculum relies on group discussion, small group work on case study examples, and even debate about outreach scholarship. Diamond (1995) and his colleagues at Syracuse University have

examined and found differences in how various disciplines define scholarship. A diverse group of faculty disciplines and outreach experience produces rich and varied discourse among academy participants that can bridge the differences Diamond found in his research.

Central to the recruitment and participation of diverse faculty, the university's deans are asked to nominate faculty from their unit for the academy. This nomination (and subsequent application) process serves several purposes.

- Ensures the support of the dean/director or department head for a faculty member who will take part in the academy
- Creates a higher level of importance and recognition for faculty as they are nominated and selected through a competitive process
- Provides a source of information about each nominee for academy planners to use in selection and assignment of coaches/mentors; ensures a cross-section of disciplines is represented in the academy
- Encourages applicants to think about an outreach scholarship project in the very beginning of the process
- Provides a clear overview of expectations (dates, deliverables, and compensation)

Program workshops: Once participants have been selected, faculty, deans, and their department chairs participate in a formal induction ceremony and luncheon. The ceremony provides evidence of the importance of the commitment the faculty are making and a means for the entire campus community to celebrate the academy. Care is taken with the selection of the food, music, and flowers to convey a special quality with this initial celebration. Ceremonies such as individual recognition of the faculty member by the provost and the signing of a ceremonial class list give the inductee a feeling of being accepted into a community. Faculty who have taken part in the academy have voiced a sincere appreciation for this part of the program, saying that the participation of senior administrators deans and department chairs sends a clear message to them about the importance of outreach scholarship at UNH.

The academy meets four to five times over one semester, for three to five hours each session, providing a combination of lecture, panel presentations, discussion, project work, and self-study.

Academy planners use face-to-face meetings, videoconferencing, coaches/mentors, case studies, and individual projects to present and reinforce the various concepts presented.

The Outreach Scholars Academy begins with a discussion of the terms outreach, engagement, and outreach scholarship. Defining outreach, service, and scholarship is an important part of a campus discussion, and universities should discuss widely how they plan to use these terms (*Lynton 1995; Ward 2003*). Participants learn about UNH's context and discuss their own understanding of the terms. The Clearinghouse and National Review Board for the Scholarship of Engagement publishes evaluation criteria for engaged scholarship, and participants practice using the criteria first on a case study, and then with their own projects.

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An entire workshop of the academy is devoted to working with community partners. In addition to discussion about the importance of partnerships, tools and suggestions for working more effectively with community partners are provided. The creation of strong partnerships that are mutually beneficial both to the university and to the community is stressed (*Holland 1997; Sandmann et al. 2000*). Faculty learn that knowledge is enhanced when it is shared by both university and community (*Checkoway 2001*). A panel discussion with faculty

who are already working successfully with partners illustrates effective application of the concepts presented.

One of the most difficult barriers to adoption of outreach scholarship is that faculty don’t believe they are rewarded for outreach in the same manner as they are for teaching and research. A workshop on how to effectively document outreach as scholarship is presented, again using case study examples and helping the participants look critically at their own outreach work and dossier. The objective of this portion of the academy is to help faculty document their outreach scholarship in a manner that will be recognized by promotion and tenure review committees as scholarly.

The academy concludes with a formal graduation ceremony and celebration. Each participant is presented with a certificate and again, university administrators, deans, department chairs,

academy alums, and guests are invited to participate and celebrate the accomplishments of the faculty.

Projects: Each faculty member enrolled in the academy is asked to develop a project, as an individual or team effort, that meets the criteria set forth by the academy for outreach scholarship. Presentations, “friendly critics,” and assignment of a faculty coach (which can be an Outreach Scholars Academy graduate, an experienced senior leader or faculty member) help refine and improve each participant’s project, so that by the end of the academy, a solid outreach scholarship project has been developed by each faculty member. Faculty members are encouraged to have a project in mind prior to the beginning of the academy, and exercises are designed to help them apply each concept taught to their own work.

Rewards: Every faculty member receives an honorarium for participating in the academy after the submission of a three- to four-page description of a potential outreach scholarship project. Faculty often use the honorarium to fund their projects. In addition, the faculty are encouraged to (and they do) submit their project to an on-campus competitive fund that seeds outreach scholarship projects. Our scholars have been very successful in being awarded those funds.

Impact of the Academy

Evaluation of the academy has been taking place at multiple levels from the onset of its first workshop. As of the conclusion of the third academy, preliminary outcomes suggest positive benefits to the university and faculty participants.

Data collected from participants via focus groups, individual interviews, survey responses, and review of written final reports indicate that faculty who completed the academy have a greater understanding of outreach scholarship and overall a greater aspiration to work with community partners. In particular, participants expressed appreciation for the university’s recognition of outreach as important *and* a potential form of scholarship. Further, they felt that the discussion time with other faculty that they don’t typically work with was very beneficial. In a one-on-one interview, one faculty member, Professor Jones,¹ observed, “This [outreach scholarship] gives a common voice to someone like me who has felt like a lone voice in their discipline.”

An important message delivered throughout the academy was the importance of scholarship in obtaining recognition and rewards for outreach work. One of the most striking impacts of the academy has been raising the level of awareness among faculty that their outreach work can be scholarly. One faculty member provided the following in a post-academy survey question:

“[participation in the] . . . Outreach Scholars Program and specifically the feedback sessions played a pivotal role in helping me to see that I had run into a stumbling block of my own. That is, I had no intention of completing the Scholarly Outreach equation by turning the experience back into scholarship. There were many reasons for this, not the least of which was my perception that this work was only very tangentially related to my real research agenda and that taking the time to write about it would take away from my research productivity. It is directly related to my research—only the context has changed.” *Associate Professor Smith*

Other faculty members have described similar impacts on their work.

“I see more possibilities to really emphasize the skills and resources that I have to the community partner. Previously I focused my outreach scholarship on the agency needs given that they were providing incentive funding and staff to assist in the project and the academy helped me develop ways to emphasize my research needs and resources that I am bringing to the project.” *Associate Professor Reynolds*

“I now see the need to establish a working relationship with potential partners beforehand that will allow for laying down the groundwork necessary for later engagement. Partners need to be part of the process for outreach, so that both scholar and partner have vested interests in the project and are mutually committed to success.” *Assistant Professor Martin*

The scope of this article doesn't allow description of all of the outreach scholars' projects, but a few exemplars were created

during the academy. Several faculty formed a team and developed a new freshman Discovery Course, designed to help new students in the sciences learn how outreach is incorporated into scientific endeavors. One faculty member determined how to incorporate a service-learning opportunity into the classroom, providing students with real-world experience helping existing extension clientele solve problems on their farms. Another faculty member is currently partnering with health care providers in the state to create a girls' health database. In conclusion, the faculty felt their work in outreach and outreach scholarship was recognized and valued during the academy and by the university.

Several faculty members also mentioned they were impressed by the induction and graduation ceremonies and appreciated being recognized by the provost, other senior leaders, deans, and chairs. They felt the small honorarium they received would help them further their outreach scholarship projects. Because of this sense of community, outreach scholars are encouraging other faculty to participate in the academy. In 2007, we had the largest pool of interested applicants ever.

Lessons Learned

The academy has changed dramatically and improved over the past three years, based on feedback and evaluation data. It has remained important to provide a small stipend (\$200–\$1,000); however, the amount of the stipend apparently did not affect the likelihood that a faculty member would participate.

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A semester-long program (as opposed to one spread over an entire academic year) is a much more manageable time frame for faculty to commit to, and we were able to present all of the information easily. We did not feel that a shorter, more intensive weekend workshop would allow the faculty time to learn the

concepts of outreach scholarship and apply them to their projects. Time is also needed to develop a cross-disciplinary community.

A national expert presented to the first academy exclusively through videoconferencing; however, while videoconferencing with a national expert remains a part of the academy, it is used only after she already has met the faculty members face-to-face

and developed a rapport with them. The addition of case studies and additional small group discussion to the workshops after the first year has proven extremely effective in helping participants internalize and apply the concepts presented.

Recruiting a cross-section of faculty from various disciplines, ranks, and genders is critical to encourage lively discourse, and we have sometimes selected members of small groups to make sure faculty communicate with people who have different backgrounds and perspectives. Sharing of expertise among such diverse faculty can lead to other collaboration in the future. Further, keeping alumni of the academy involved in a variety of ways keeps them enthusiastic about outreach scholarship. Faculty alumni are asked to nominate new academy participants, serve as coaches or on the selection committee, review discretionary outreach scholarship grant proposals, and speak as part of our experts' panel.

Support from university administrators is critical to the academy's ultimate success. This includes ongoing communication and discussion with the university's provost, deans, and department chairs to garner support and identify potential candidates for the academy. Securing a sustainable budget to plan, execute and sustain the program is also key. Without this support, the Outreach Scholars Academy cannot become part of the institution's fabric.

Implications and Future Questions

Faculty development is an important and effective way to increase the recognition and awareness of outreach as a scholarly endeavor. It also serves as a means of connecting faculty from various disciplines. Shared experience in the academy and discussion about what outreach scholarship might look like for each faculty member not only help clarify the concept, but also provide a catalyst for future interdisciplinary work. Long-term study is ongoing to evaluate how academy alumni use their knowledge and skills in their current and future work and to influence other faculty members and policy on campus.

The academy alone, absent university leadership and support, as well as willing community partners, will not likely create systemic institutional change with respect to engagement. Continued effort to include administrators, deans, department heads, and faculty senate leaders in the discussion about outreach scholarship is important. Institutional change of any type takes time and often requires multiple approaches.

National Interest in the Academy

The University of New Hampshire is one of many institutions of higher education seeking to become more engaged. The University of New Hampshire Outreach Scholars Academy curriculum model could be adopted by other universities interested in faculty development to support engagement and greater understanding of outreach scholarship on their campuses. We have received tremendous interest in the curriculum and are utilizing multiple approaches to disseminate our model.

The creators of the academy are sharing information about the academy curriculum, impacts, and supporting resources via the Web at <http://www.unh.edu/outreach-scholars>. Video clips, faculty profiles, presentations, and workshop activities are presented, along with logistical information and budget detail. Academy impacts and all the information necessary to develop a similar academy at another institution are also there. We are also presenting our model and results at a national outreach scholarship conference.

The adoption and evaluation of the Outreach Scholars Academy curriculum in other institutional settings will help to improve the content and delivery methods of the curriculum as well as provide greater evidence of its effectiveness in furthering outreach scholarship in higher education.

Endnote

1. Pseudonyms have been used for responses to interview and survey questions. Survey responses and focus group transcripts are available from Eleanor Abrams, University of New Hampshire.

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