Inclusive Assessment: Toward a Socially-Just Methodology for Measuring Institution-Wide Engagement

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Abstract

Institutions are increasingly being called upon to collect large amounts of data to demonstrate community impact. At institutions with strong and wide-reaching public engagement/service missions, this expectation is even greater – both for quality improvement and for demonstrating regional transformation. Despite these expectations, the decentralized culture of many campuses and lack of external incentives for individual faculty and departments can present significant barriers to telling a complete, representative, institutional story of engagement. This article explores the efforts of one campus to develop an inclusive assessment methodology in order to meet multifaceted institutional needs and navigate challenges. We take into account the particular dynamics of a specific campus culture to develop a process that is unique to the needs and particularities of our institution. At the same time, we hope that this methodology will demonstrate transferability to other institutions.

Public universities are under increasing pressure to justify outreach and engagement efforts through measurable, definable community impacts. At the same time, this call for easily-understood impacts can short-change efforts that involve qualitative, gradual, and harder-to-define outcomes. These qualitative impacts can include the perceptions different community partners have of the institution, the often messy process of partnership building, and the process of brainstorming issues that are of mutual import to both the institution and community members. At best, rushing to create measurable, institution-wide impacts on communities, risks sabotaging long-term, sustainable, reciprocal program development. At worst, it risks alienating community members from engaging in partnerships at all.

Engaged scholars and administrators cannot ignore the culture of austerity that is pervasive within public universities, however. We are expected to do more with less. We are expected to justify our efforts in all realms, not just those related to outreach and engagement. So, measurable, definable community impacts must be collected and reported in a timely manner. In other to meet both these needs – the need for slower, more qualitative assessments of community impacts and the need for quicker, more easily defined impacts – we introduce a methodology we call "inclusive assessment" that seeks to mesh qualitative and quantitative data collection within the same assessment effort in order to ensure inclusivity.

In order to fully explore this methodology, its limitations, and the opportunities it presents for new research into institution-wide engagement efforts, we reflect on our own experiences utilizing inclusive assessment at an engaged university with strong ties to its local community, a university that is also feeling the crunch of austerity. We begin with a literature review of assessment scholarship to identify trends around the development of more flexible, mixed-methods approaches to assessment. Through these trends, we identify key precedents to the methodology of inclusive assessment. We then explicate this methodology and its key tenets. Finally, we demonstrate the viability of this methodology by drawing on our experiences deploying it at our own institution. Our ultimate goal is to provide other scholars and practitioners with best practices for meeting programmatic needs while continuing to thrive in difficult economic times.

Inclusive Assessment: Towards a New Methodology

More and more institutions are being expected to champion a "culture of evidence" around their community engagement efforts. With statewide governing boards and legislative bodies charged with making funding decisions according to campus performance, external pressures that demand accountability are felt on nearly every campus. These pressures seem particularly poignant in statewide systems, as one-size-fits-all models of accountability and performance often create friction when applied to local contexts and campuses (Douglass, Thomson, and Zhao 2012). The evidence being called for can range from impacts on local community health indexes to quantitative measures of student engagement to numbers of community-engaged courses. In "A Scholar-Practitioner Model of Assessment," Erwin and Wise (2002, 68) note that "assessment results are increasingly 'counting' toward institutional funding, state appropriations for higher education, governance, and reputation. In this high stakes environment, the quality and credibility of learning outcome data are becoming more sophisticated and complex."

To complicate things further, there is an ever-widening range of definitions in the field of community engagement. Scholars and historians in the field note that practitioners – both early career and seasoned professionals—must navigate a "sea of definitions" when first engaging in this work (Ikeda, Sandy, and Donahue 2010). While one institution may talk of service-learning and equate it with community-engaged learning, other institutions may talk of civic engagement and the democratic learning outcomes achieved by their students. This lengthy set of terms – understandably dependent on and arising from particular campus cultures – does little to provide a clear path for institutions to tell their own narratives of community impact. Member institutions of the University of North Carolina have engaged in recent dialogue about this challenge. A community and economic engagement report published by the UNC system (University of North Carolina, Office of International, Community, and Economic Engagement 2015) notes that "ongoing conversations continue...about what criteria campuses should use to assess and quantify their ability to engage the community. And while community and public service is now one of the five elements of institutional effectiveness in reaffirmation reports submitted to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) (Standard 3.3.1.5), there is no agreement on how to define, measure, or improve university engagement" (p. 5).

This push for accountability measures has been presented from a quality improvement perspective. The availability of accurate data and accompanying analysis would, naturally, allow institutions to fill gaps in their overall community engagement strategy. As a result of this external call for accountability, many institutions have worked to develop common measures. This has led to some streamlining and efficiency. At the same time, it has encouraged institutions to engage in internal conversations about their own systematic collection of engagement data and the resources they put toward that effort. In 2013, University of North Carolina President Tom Ross challenged campuses to remember their overarching commitment to the people of the state, saying, "Community engagement and economic development are two critically important and closely interconnected strategies through which UNC students, faculty, staff, and alumni contribute to the promotion of vibrant, healthy, sustainable, and safe communities in North Carolina" (University of North Carolina, Office of International, Community, and Economic Engagement 2013, 2).

In order to meet the demands for an increasingly varied and metric-driven reporting system, we introduce a methodology we are calling "inclusive assessment" that seeks to counteract a focus on pure numbers with the use of qualitative engagement data. This informed use of qualitative data can further enable institutions to collaborate with community members. Listening, as scholars in community-engaged research methods know, is a critical foundation for this work, and ensures the inclusion of "issues of identity and difference as a way of helping [engagement participants to] alter their personal and worldviews" (Chesler and Scalera 2000, 19). At the same time, as the Creating Impact in North Carolina…UNC Engagement Report (University of North Carolina, Office of International, Community, and Economic Engagement 2015) recently suggested, "there is no agreement on how to define, measure, or improve university engagement." Inclusive assessment thus seeks to present a new model for defining the assessment of university-based engagement around three goals:

1. Assessment Goal 1: Formulating Cross-Disciplinary Teams for Assessment
2. Assessment Goal 2: Measuring Activities versus Impacts
3. Assessment Goal 3: Formulating Data Collection Processes in Decentralized Environments

We explore each of these goals extensively below. They were articulated both through our own internal conversations working in a large, public university with deep community roots and through our growing understanding of the needs of scholars at other universities who seek more flexible, adaptable methodologies for conducting assessment.

Though this methodology was developed in the context of creating assessment goals at our own institution, we view these goals as benchmarks for an incipient methodology. By this we mean to indicate that after developing these assessment goals, we realized that meeting them would require a new methodology for assessment community engagement data. As we worked to meet these goals, we thus began to develop inclusive assessment as a means of understanding whether or not we had reached these goals. Having met several of these goals, we now hope that inclusive assessment can be of use to engaged scholars at other universities trying to meet similar goals.

Existing methodologies for assessment within universities are often underpinned by problematic assumptions regarding the relationship between campuses and their local communities and thus warrant the development of new methodologies. Weerts and Sandmann (2008, 74), for instance, tracked the ways in which universities often use a "one-way" model of knowledge creation when engaging communities, a model in which communities are seen as empty vessels to be filled with university-based knowledge. Similarly, D'Arlach, Sánchez, and Feuer (2009, 5) warn that when universities set out to assess their engagement efforts based on university-conceived goals, "community engagement becomes an end for the university and not a mutually agreed upon goal." In a somewhat radical critique of using "scientific measures of success" to benchmark university-based community engagement, Mathieu (2005, xiv) has argued that such approaches assume the "university [as] the controlling institution determining movements and interactions."

In the wake of such strong critiques of university efforts to measure the success of community engagement based on their own scale, inclusive assessment draws heavily on several established methodologies for empirical research that lend themselves to an inclusive, socially-just approach to data collection. Focused ethnography, for instance, attempts to account for the "pluralization [sic] of life-worlds and the enormous specialization [sic] of professional activities [which] demands ever detailed descriptions of people's ways of life and their increasingly specialized [sic] and fragmented activities" (Knoblauch, 2005). An ethnographic approach incorporates "detailed accounts of the concrete experience of life within a particular culture and of the beliefs and social rules that are used as resources within it" (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995, 10). Focused ethnography, as differentiated from traditional ethnography, is characterized by the use of "relatively short-term field visits" as opposed to the full immersion common to other varieties of ethnography (Knoblauch 2005). Similarly, inclusive assessment is developed on the premise that total immersion within the contexts being assessed is not always possible, especially at larger universities. Rather than engage in long-term field visits, inclusive assessment seeks to collect contextualized data whenever possible in short-term visits to contexts that are neglected by large-scale assessment approaches.

In this way, another important precedent for inclusive assessment is mixed-methods research, particularly what Creswell (2014, 15) called "convergent parallel mixed methods" research. For Creswell, this is "a form of mixed methods design in which the researcher converges or merges quantitative and qualitative data in order to provide a comprehensive analysis of the research problem." Similarly, inclusive assessment seeks to gain a more holistic picture of community outcomes by focusing on team-building across departments, the measuring of specific activities rather than impacts, and the collection of data in environments that don't naturally connect with one another (i.e., university needs for accountability vs. community needs for activities that solve problems). In other words, rather than attempting to adapt our own institutional contexts to the needs of existing research and assessment methodologies, we attempted to adapt existing methodologies to the needs of our context by combining them into a holistic framework.

Finally, this turn from a larger-scale view to a micro-view that attempts to capture the relationship between key engagement metrics (i.e., total hours of engagement, numbers of partnerships, numbers of projects, etc.) and more qualitative means of assessment (i.e., specific outcomes as articulated by both community partners and scholars, student perceptions of engaged teaching, etc.), also draws on qualitative case study methodology (Miles and Huberman 1994; Stake 1995, 2000; Yin 2009). Inclusive assessment seeks to capture and describe a cross-sectional view of assessment data that includes numerical data that meets administrator needs, qualitative data that takes into account community needs, and a focus on the specific context from which all this data arises. By bundling this data into one multi-faceted case, powerful new insights are gleaned without sacrificing rigor and institutional outcomes. Below we present our own institutional context to demonstrate the need for such a methodology and to provide a limited case for the development of this methodology.

Institutional Context

Our campus has a long history of serving and engaging with the local community. Originally a teacher-training school in North Carolina, the institution grew up out of its local community and has striven to not forget its roots. Indeed, the school touts its commitment to public service and regional transformation at almost every turn – in strategic planning documents, in mission statements, and in official university communications. There is also significant evidence that this commitment goes beyond talk, however. Many faculty engage in community-based research projects. Students regularly serve the local community through co-curricular volunteer activities, often contributing more than one hundred thousand hours to the community per year. And community outreach activities – from summer camps to literacy programs to nutrition education programs – fill university calendars.

This culture of community engagement centers around the notion of "servire," the university's long-standing term to describe its mission which translates as "to serve." Official publications describe this commitment to public service as "ECU faculty, staff, and students working to improve communities in North Carolina and beyond. Our students, faculty, staff, and senior leaders all are integral parts of our community, and our community is an integral part of who we are at ECU" (East Carolina University n.d.). This notion of campus and community being inextricably linked – and being integral to one another – creates a unique environment on campus. As such, the institution – by definition – cannot do its work if it is not engaged with and listening to its community. While there are inherent power differences between a large institution and a small, rural community, both institutional efforts to stay true to its mission and community pride help maintain a healthy partnership.

Much of our work on campus also involves a deep awareness of place and historical context. According to Wilkinson (1990, 75), "our species thrives on the subtle, intangible, but soul-deep mix of landscape, smells, sounds, history, neighbors, and friends that constitute a place. An ethic of place respects equally the people of a region and the land, animals, vegetation, water and air." In rural areas in particular, or in any community where the power differential between campus and community is pronounced, community engagement mandates that university administrators, faculty, and students recognize the importance of place to community stakeholders. At our institution, we have explored ways to use the concept of place to collaborate with our local rural community in a variety of ways.

This place-based awareness stems from two sources in our view. First, because the university speaks regularly of striving to live out its mission of service, that mission becomes less of an externally imposed mandate and more of an intrinsic identifier for the campus community. As the university chancellor states often in passing, “Community engagement and service are in our DNA on this campus.” When describing the culture and overall feel of the campus, many make mention of its connection to the community and region. Second, the location of the university in a historically poor and marginalized region of the state makes the overall need for intentional sharing of university resources much greater.

Specifically, because our institution’s place-based service happens in a largely rural setting, relationships between faculty, students, administration, and community partners are fostered and nourished with this context in mind. The twenty-six counties in Eastern North Carolina have historically been some of the poorest counties in the entire state. Thus, the need for strong, sustained partnerships that have identifiable outcomes and impacts in the community is a necessity. The university is the largest institution of higher learning in the region. Thus, there is the recognition that not only is community engagement built into the fabric of the institution, but there are limited resources already coming into the community. Greater responsibility is placed on the institution to be responsive to the community and its needs.

Assessment Goal 1: Formulating Cross-Disciplinary Teams for Assessment

Much can be said for institutions that figure out how to work across so-called “silos,” particularly when it comes to institution-wide assessment. Being able to articulate a campus’ engagement narrative based on a seamless and efficient data collection system and subsequent analysis can be a daunting challenge. But many campuses take up this challenge with the hope of achieving this goal. A key part of this challenge seems to be the overall level of receptivity to collaboration and partnership with participants. That is, campus stakeholders must be able to see how their assessment work not only benefits their individual units, but also the institution as a whole. Seeking and articulating shared purpose and common goals are significant challenges and opportunities. This means that when assessment is done in an atmosphere of support and mutual encouragement, individuals can approach the work as a team. Noted assessment scholar and author Trudy Banta praises this kind of approach, saying “Assessment is most effective when undertaken in an environment that is receptive, supportive, and enabling” (Banta 2002, 62). Our team-building efforts tried to keep this in mind as we built a cross-disciplinary team for assessing community engagement efforts. Our institution undertook the challenge to build an assessment team based on both accountability and support.

At the invitation of our statewide Campus Compact office, a group of engagement leaders on our campus convened to attempt to develop this team. Campus Compact served as the initiating body for this work, having invited groups of institutional teams over the past few years to engage institution-wide assessment work. Presented as a type of professional development activity for engagement leaders on campus, the initiative promised to provide guidance, support, and direction for each campus enrolled in the cohort for the initiative. Further, the initiative brought together leaders from other institutions across the state, helping to continue to build a network of statewide engagement in higher education.

Leaders from our assessment office, health sciences campus, student affairs, chancellor's community relations staff, and others were invited to join the team. These individuals were chosen so that a broad spectrum of university representatives would engage in the discussion. This group ranged from senior administrators responsible for school or divisional assessment reporting to institutional research staff to departmental representatives charged with "on the ground" assessment. As such, our evolving cross-disciplinary assessment team began the process by developing a project charter to clarify our aims. This charter was articulated in a bold manner. The charter reads:

In an effort to support the mission of the university – 'to be a national model for student success, public service, and regional transformation'—the objective of the Measuring and Monitoring Community Engagement (MMCE) project is to successfully institutionalize a comprehensive measuring and monitoring system that will document ongoing initiatives and their impact across the university and communities of North Carolina and beyond. MMCE will also afford the university systematic processes for capturing, analyzing, evaluating, and disseminating community engagement data to inform and guide our decisions. Reliable, valid, and accessible data will increase the university's capability to more efficiently redirect institutional resources in an effort to respond to rapidly changing public and regional needs. Additionally, MMCE will allow the university to capture an institutional narrative of public service activities.

Much of the work of this group centered around identifying current data collection processes – annual outcomes assessment for units across campus, engaged research activities by individual faculty, and engagement metrics requested by statewide reporting systems. Somewhat surprisingly, many of the individuals around the table were unaware of the extensive nature of our data collection across campus. Similarly, many were unaware about just how these data had been used for either internal improvement or external reporting. The team-based approach allowed stakeholders from different divisions and reporting areas within the university to come together, to understand each other's work, and to attempt to determine how to best use the vast array of data being collected. Our goal was to move away from assessment as accumulating a "repository of information" to assessment as "thoughtful and structured change and improvement." Ultimately, we challenged ourselves to understand the mantra of "the mission is my mission."

There is precedent for this type of team-based approach, particularly within decentralized campus environments. Arcario and others (2013, 22) suggest that "the creation of a strong faculty-led assessment leadership team who are committed to an on-going process of thinking and rethinking the outcomes assessment approach" is critically important for each campus. Thus, not only should the outcomes assessment process be continually evaluated, but the broader engagement assessment process should also be continually critiqued. Our team-based working group attempted to do just that – identify current data collection and make thoughtful recommendations for how these data could be used to tell key parts of the institution's story about its connection to the community. One important next step in this team-based process will be to include community partner voices. Only internal campus stakeholders directed the work for this first iteration. Community voices will help to further ground this process and provide important perspective.

Assessment Goal 2: Measuring Activities versus Impacts

Over the past several years, institutions have been expected to report engagement metrics. Many universities collect student community service hours that serve as useful data for internal reporting and messaging. These hours and accompanying information on student placements within the community can provide interesting insight into trends in student engagement. Moreover, there are a number of third-party data collection systems that allow universities to easily track their students' engagement hours in the community. These systems allow for reporting on types of social issues in which students take action and total numbers of students who are self-reporting those hours as well as providing a snapshot of hours contributed to local community partner agencies.

While the collection of these quantitative data can offer interesting information about student involvement, some questions exist about the overall usefulness of these data. Further, there is lack of rigorous agreement at the highest levels of reporting on key definitions and concepts. The Creating Impact…UNC Engagement Report (University of North Carolina, Office of International, Community, and Economic Engagement 2015) suggests that:

> we know that the majority of our campuses have been designated 'engaged universities' under criteria developed by the Carnegie Foundation and a majority of our campuses have been named to the 'honor roll' of the national President's Higher Education Community Service based on a different set of 'engagement' criteria. Ongoing conversations continue at meetings of the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities about what criteria campuses should use to assess and quantify their ability to engage the community. And while community and public service is now one of the five elements of institutional effectiveness in reaffirmation reports submitted to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) (Standard 3.3.1.5), there is no agreement on how to define, measure, or improve university engagement (p. 5).

With a multitude of criteria at the national level, campuses are pulled in different directions when it comes to deciding how to dedicate assessment resources.

At large institutions, there are also inherent flaws in collection and reporting when data are largely self-reported. Mechanisms exist to verify student participation in community engagement activities, but these mechanisms are never without error. Therefore, these engagement hours only tell part of the story of student engagement. For the most part, they offer a surface-level view of student involvement and activities.

Our inclusive assessment strategy, then, takes into account this push for collecting and reporting on these metrics, but attempts to diversify this data with qualitative accounts. We couple these broad assessment and reporting measures with smaller, more focused efforts. For example, our institution has begun to collect narratives of community impact to highlight some of the qualitative aspects of student engagement. These narratives are sometimes used for larger external reporting. We have also used these narratives for internal "annual report" functions as well as institution-wide divisional reporting. These narratives are frequently used to highlight how we are working toward achieving objectives stated in our strategic plan. Our next step is to find ways to catalog these narratives for easy access. Unfortunately, with multiple internal reporting and data repositories – from assessment data warehouses to faculty performance portfolios to student engagement tracking systems – this goal is not without its challenges.

Further, qualitative understandings of data we collect on student service hours show what students learn from their experiences. We have developed an observation protocol to guide our assessment efforts for large-scale "days of service" activities. These observations are designed to capture data that might go unnoticed and unreported if only quantitative measures were used. For example, students might report on a survey instrument that their overall commitment to community was enhanced as a result of the experience of service. They also might report that they have a greater sense of citizenship, largely because of the interactions they had with local community. To add to this picture, observation data – collected by trained students – might describe actual student interactions with community leaders. These qualitative data show students asking questions, listening intently. Other data might describe student body language during the experience. While the students might seem comfortable around their peers and working in small groups (as one would expect of first-year students), observation data might tell us that their interactions with unfamiliar contexts in the local community brought discomfort.

To further add to the overall picture of this experience, student leaders are asked to collect student responses to reflection questions. During the service experience and shortly afterward, student leaders engage other student participants in a guided conversation. These conversations attempt to summarize student experiences – to let them voice their individualized "lessons learned" – with the goal of each student listening carefully to each other. Once students are finished talking about their experiences, they aggregate their shared experiences into common themes. A closing activity with all participants – also led by day-of-service student leaders – involves each small group sharing their compiled lessons learned and take-away themes. These themes are then used to draft an assessment report about the overall day. Student Affairs educators review the student reflections and select key quotes to share with community partners. Again, these themes are compared with compiled survey data from an online assessment instrument.

Other examples come out of our alternative break programming within our Division of Student Affairs. While each student is expected to complete a “service experiences survey” both before and after their travels, other qualitative measures are also employed. Using a model borrowed from National Public Radio’s “This I Believe” program, students participate in a closing reflection activity once they return from their trip. After collectively reviewing their reflection notes and daily journal activities, the student participants attempt to summarize their experience in a “now what?” framing. That is, as a group, the students make a statement about what they experience, what they learned about the community and/or particular community and social issues, and what they believe moving forward. In a sense, the exercise encourages students to make their commitment more concrete and sustainable. They state it publicly for other students, faculty, and administrators to hear at a closing ceremony for the program. This closing program provides a forum for students to articulate a public statement about their learning where they make a firm commitment to the community from which they learned.

All of these assessment methods seek to paint a fuller picture of student learning through service. Thus, while challenges exist about how service experiences and community engagement work can be categorized and classified, these diverse assessment measures are intended to provide a more holistic view. Further, they can help provide a solid grounding for critiques against assessment efforts that only describe activities. While description of activity is important, this more holistic approach helps to further elucidate impact on students. Additionally, the assessment results – and the process of generating and collecting them in public forums – allows students to hear about the learnings of other students directly. This can be a powerful exercise and enables students to teach each other about their experiences. Thus, the assessment effort serves a twofold purpose: collecting program data for quality improvement and providing summative, public experiences for students to educate one another.

Assessment Goal 3: Formulating Data Collection Processes in Decentralized Environments

Our third goal emerges as both an achievement and a work in progress. Our hope is that we will continue to refine this goal as we develop staff – both professional and student – capacity in program assessment. One of the significant challenges related to the assessment of engagement work is that there are a variety of assessment “champions.” These champions do good work on campus and are committed to both ongoing quality improvement of their work and telling an important public service narrative. Yet, these individuals are located within different divisions, schools, and departments. With different reporting structures, position responsibilities, and spheres of influence, these individuals could very easily work in isolation within their respective areas. Our engagement assessment team seemed to understand this challenge from the start. Thus, our strategy involved identifying resources and assets at our ready disposal.

Those identified assets certainly included student leaders who are regularly engaged in community engagement work. They take seriously the programs they oversee, often infusing passion into them that no professional staff member could offer. Many of those who are best poised to lead this assessment work are student staff members and student leaders. But student participants in community engagement programs can also add to the institution's public service narrative as well. These students often carry remarkable stories of transformation, partnership with community agencies, and initiatives on specific social issues. Our work involves making sure that these powerful student stories are heard and promoted.

We took as our lead some of the outreach and process-building work that was done for our institution's Carnegie Community Engagement Classification application. In reflecting on one campus' efforts, assessment leader Zuiches (2008, 44) suggested that it is important to "reach out to leaders in units on campus where programs are conducted and records are kept – a vital prerequisite on a decentralized campus. Whenever possible, make the request in person. Describe your need or word the survey instrument you use in campus-vernacular terms instead of the language of the Carnegie framework." Because our campus had worked diligently to collect useful information for the Carnegie classification in 2008, and subsequent re-appointment in 2015, we sought to build on the culture of assessment that was created through that process.

What emerged was a renewed conversation about recognition and rewards for engaged faculty. A few empirical studies have been conducted into the work of civic engagement within the university and the specific role faculty play in this work (Dey 2009; Ellison and Eatman 2008; O'Meara 2012; Ward et al. 2013). The focus of this literature has been describing and making intelligible how faculty contribute to civic engagement through their main activities (e.g., teaching, research, and service). Of these studies, none have focused specifically on early career faculty, however, and the way these professionals develop identities as researchers vis-a-vis the scholarship of engagement. Instead, the focus has been on establishing structures of inclusion for conducting civic work across disciplines, largely by describing successful examples of this work across a wide variety of disciplines.

One of the most robust examples of this descriptive scholarship is Ellison and Eatman (2008, iv), who interviewed dozens of faculty at a variety of career stages across disciplines ranging from the visual arts to education. In their own words, their aim is to "propose concrete ways to remove obstacles to academic work carried out for and/or with the public by giving such work full standing as scholarship, research, or artistic creation." Specifically, they seek to describe the work of engaged faculty across four "continuums" (2008, ix):

- a continuum of scholarship within which academic public engagement has full and equal standing;

- a continuum of scholarly and creative artifacts;
- a continuum of professional pathways for faculty, including the choice to be a civic professional; and
- a continuum of actions for institutional change.

Their goal in describing these continuums is to map the many ways in which faculty create knowledge that is useful to partners beyond the university.

Ultimately, our efforts challenged us to further the work of scholars such as Ellison and Eatman (2008, ix) and others by more fully describing how stakeholders involved in community engagement deal with a variety of "conditions of knowledge." In other words, we wish to understand how conditions within universities both influence, and are influenced by, engaged knowledge-making. We posit that these conditions of knowledge are affected and influenced by a variety of cultural factors within individual academic disciplines and units. Perceptions of engaged and public forms of scholarship, particular emphases articulated by accrediting bodies, agendas and perspectives promoted by departmental leaders, and key thought leaders within fields – to name only a few – are all potential influences that impact one's identity as an engaged scholar. Further, by focusing on disciplines beyond the humanities and social sciences (e.g., the health sciences), our assessment work hopes to add a more inclusive scope to the work of engagement.

These various efforts at building a system of data collection processes in a decentralized environment – from valuing the unique contributions of student leaders and participants in the assessment process, to building on previously established work patterns, to using this process to encourage us to think about the many ways faculty assess their engagement work – now have positioned us well. We are able to see with more clarity the gaps that exist on our campus and opportunities that may have not been capitalized upon previously. As the saying goes, "the destination is the journey." This journey of building campus-wide networks to streamline data collection and analysis has shown us what next steps we might take in our journey toward inclusive assessment.

Conclusion

More than anything, we hope to further a conversation regarding holistic, inclusive approaches to the assessment of university engagement projects. We invite fellow researchers and practitioners of engaged scholarship, teaching, and service to try out, critique, and help refine the methodology we are calling inclusive assessment. This methodology is simply an outcome of our own struggles to assess engagement in a manner that is fair to all stakeholders involved, including community members. It is also an outcome of our attention to the exciting engaged research happening at universities around the world.

We hope to follow up this article with a case study that explores our methodology and its limitations within the scope of a specific engagement project and its attendant outcomes. Our goal in this follow-up study will be to assess the strengths and limitations of inclusive assessment as an empirical model for producing research findings as well as assessment outcomes. This new goal will undoubtedly cause us to reassess (pun intended) this model and its validity in a research context. Some questions we hope to answer in this inquiry will include: What are the limitations of this model as a research methodology? Can inclusive assessment as inclusive research produce outcomes for both scholars and local stakeholders? What needs to shift in our approach for this to happen?

We present this next step here in hopes that other scholars will try out this methodology in various contexts as a tool for research, assessment, or both, and will create their own outcomes and inclusive models. As we develop this methodology within our own institutional context, we are very curious if it will be useful in other contexts, and if not, why? Ultimately, whatever context fellow engaged scholars are operating in, we hope inclusive assessment will help them think about how to respond to institutional pressures without sacrificing the needs of community members. Such an aim calls for more robust models for assessment and research that are flexible and socially just.

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