

A Proposal for Defining and Promoting a Scholarship of Engagement at University of Massachusetts Amherst

Scholarly Engagement is the creation, integration, application and transmission of knowledge for the benefit of external audiences and the University and occurs in all areas of the University Mission: research, teaching and service. The quality and value of Scholarly Engagement is determined by academic peers and community partners.

-UMass Faculty Senate Outreach Council, 2006

Engagement includes a broad variety of activities that draw upon the unique knowledge and expertise of faculty to solve problems and enhance the quality of life in Massachusetts in ways that fulfill our institutional mission. The University of Massachusetts Amherst needs an appropriate definition as well as an institutional framework to support and promote Engagement that is of high quality, has value to the community and to individual faculty members. Faculty and departments will more readily embrace a “Scholarship of Engagement” if the processes and products of Engagement are better understood, are properly disseminated and open to peer review.

According to a recent statement by the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC), University Engagement remains a “fundamental and essential characteristic of public higher education. Through Engagement, universities and communities demonstrate a sustained commitment to each other that is defined by mutual respect.” We must ensure a consistent exchange between our academic departments and centers, funded research projects, and the intellectual expertise of our faculty and the external community, so that scholarship at University of Massachusetts Amherst remains public in the very broadest sense.

The Challenge for UMass: Three perspectives

National Perspective

Through work sponsored initially by the Kellogg Commission and the Wingspread Conference initiative, an ongoing national dialogue has focused on both understanding and influencing the roles and responsibilities of publicly supported universities. This trend has gained momentum and has allowed faculty and administrators from elite research universities across the nation to collectively elaborate on how an engaged and responsive university is critical to the health and well-being of individuals, families, businesses, communities, and the university itself. This national trend is currently reflected in the Carnegie Classification system for Institutions of Higher Education for which “Community Engagement” will soon be an elective category.

An ongoing context for this national discussion is the annual Outreach Scholarship Conference sponsored by Ohio State University, Pennsylvania State University, University of Wisconsin and University of Georgia. The University of Georgia also

publishes the Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement. These venues have helped to unite a community of engaged scholars from diverse disciplines who are committed to the concept of ‘The Engaged Institution.’ The annual conference, in particular, provides a unique opportunity for scholars and practitioners to share strategies for conducting and promoting Scholarly Engagement. It also provides a forum for high-level administrators, university presidents and chancellors to articulate their vision of what universities can accomplish in the public arena.

The Faculty Senate Outreach Council is seeking to encourage UMass faculty from a variety of disciplines to document the quality and impact of their work that reaches beyond the borders of the university and to share their experiences and ideas with other scholars. Ultimately, we would like both faculty and administrators from UMass to become active participants and leaders of the national conversation on The Scholarship of Engagement.

Disciplinary/Department Perspective

Any broad discussion on the Scholarship of Engagement from a national perspective must be seen primarily as a vehicle for further elaboration within the disciplines and academic departments at University of Massachusetts Amherst. Each academic field has its own terminology, standards and expectations for work that engages individuals, organizations and communities external to the university. This includes how such work can be documented, transmitted and reviewed within a scholarly framework. Ultimately, the responsibility for understanding and appropriately rewarding Scholarly Engagement can only occur through a deliberative process; a process that is well-attuned to the details of what faculty in a specific discipline are doing, how that work is accomplished and how the quality and the impact of that work is determined.

There is considerable variation in the degree to which engaging partners outside of the university is an essential condition for achieving academic excellence within a discipline. In most instances, a healthy, well-rounded academic department will encompass a range of experiences for both faculty and students, from the most abstract and theoretical, to creative opportunities, to building technical expertise that is readily applied in professional fields. Direct involvement with communities enhances the overall quality of the education that an academic department offers and the scholarship that is produced.

We believe academic departments at UMass should participate in a process of reflection and deliberation to determine standards for rigor, quality, and peer and external review for Scholarly Engagement. Through internal deliberations and through discussions with disciplinary peers from other institutions, academic departments can provide the appropriate means for recognizing and rewarding Scholarly Engagement that are based on the unique standards of the discipline. The ability to recognize and reward a broad array of scholarly activities will make our academic departments more dynamic learning environments and more attractive to both students and scholars.

Individual Faculty Perspective

Many University of Massachusetts faculty members are already deeply involved in initiatives that can be understood as Scholarly Engagement. In a recent series of inquiries and discussions initiated by the Faculty Senate Outreach Council and the Vice-Provost for Outreach, it was clear that diverse faculty from all schools and colleges are conducting creative, scholarly work that is high quality and has great value, both within academic departments and for the external communities that are engaged.

There is a profound need to for a conceptual framework that will support Scholarly Engagement across the various disciplines. Through this process, much of the work that individual faculty are already doing that engages people, organizations and communities outside the university can be increasingly understood, recognized and rewarded as scholarship. By creating a conceptual framework and a common language to describe the general principles and processes that guide Scholarly Engagement, and providing forums for interested faculty to share experiences and ideas, a university culture of Scholarly Engagement can emerge.

Goals and Objectives

Goals

The Faculty Senate Outreach Council in conjunction with UMass Amherst Outreach will pursue a multifaceted approach over the next 3-5 years that promotes Scholarly Engagement from all three of the perspectives detailed above (national, disciplinary/department, and individual faculty) with the following goals:

- Academic departments at UMass will increasingly understand, value and reward Scholarly Engagement
- UMass faculty, deans and administrators will become leaders on campus and participate in the national discussion on the Scholarship of Engagement
- UMass faculty will become increasingly involved with and committed to Scholarly Engagement

Ultimately, our success in achieving these goals will be reflected in a campus-wide culture that embraces a Scholarship of Engagement and in greater public support based on the perception that University of Massachusetts Amherst is an accessible resource and a reliable partner.

Objectives

1) **The Faculty Senate Outreach Council will expand efforts to actively promote Scholarly Engagement.** The council will:

- Continue to meet individually with academic departments to develop a shared understanding of the meaning and value of Scholarly Engagement at the University of Massachusetts
- Support departmental efforts to establish benchmarks for Scholarly Engagement
- Establish contact with faculty and administrators who are involved with Scholarly Engagement at other Universities or at the national level
- Identify UMass faculty currently involved with initiatives that are appropriately viewed as Scholarly Engagement

2) **The Faculty Senate Outreach Council in conjunction with UMass Amherst Outreach will develop a comprehensive document that details the common ‘Principles and Practices’ of Scholarly Engagement, which will be widely circulated on campus.** This document will:

- Offer a shared conceptual framework and common language for communicating about Scholarly Engagement
- Provide guidelines to help academic departments define the relevant disciplinary benchmarks for measuring Scholarly Engagement
- Encourage review and revision in the existing Annual Faculty Review process to increasingly reward Scholarly Engagement

3) **The Faculty Senate Outreach Council in conjunction with UMass Amherst Outreach will increase efforts to develop and support events, on and off campus, which will bring individuals together around the issue of Scholarly Engagement.**

These events will provide opportunities to employ the language of Scholarly Engagement in a context that celebrates this work, stimulates dialogue and generates collaborative and interdisciplinary applications.

This paper was developed by the UMass Faculty Senate Outreach Council and the Office of Outreach in summer, 2006. Send any comments or questions to wamiller@umext.umass.edu. This document is posted online at: http://www.umass.edu/outreach/scholarly_engagement/index.html