

Incorporating Community Engagement in Faculty Reward Policies [conference material]

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Abstract:

Changing promotion and tenure guidelines to recognize and value community engagement as an aspect of academic work is challenging and complex. One reason is because policies tend to vary significantly across institutions with regard to structure and content. Further, within institutions that have unit- and department-level policies, guidelines may vary due to differences in ways that faculty and/or disciplines understand and value community engagement as legitimate scholarly work. Therefore it is important to examine, critique, and develop processes of incorporating community engagement into tenure and promotion guidelines in order to understand different articulations and interpretations of the meaning, role, and value of community engagement as faculty work.

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*****Note: Full text of article below**

Incorporating Community Engagement in Faculty Reward Policies

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Background and Topic Framing

In their work, “Publicly Engaged Scholars,” Post, Ward, Longo, and Saltmarsh (2016) point out, “there are indications that the next generation of students and scholars, a much more racially and ethnically diverse group, are increasingly public in their identities and are developing new patterns of engagement that are changing the nature of teaching, learning, and knowledge generation” (p. 1). In order to recruit, retain, and value this diverse group of scholars, community engagement must be supported and recognized in meaningful ways. Integrating community engagement into tenure and promotion guidelines is a way to do so as this inclusion signals to faculty that community engagement is valued and rewarded.

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The University of North Carolina at Greensboro’s (UNCG) process of incorporating community engagement into its tenure and promotion guidelines provides a case for examination. UNCG is a large, public research university, classified by the Carnegie Foundation as a high research activity, majority of color, community engagement institution. UNCG’s mission reflects the essence of these classifications: “The University of North Carolina at Greensboro will redefine the public research university for the 21st century as an inclusive, collaborative, and responsive institution making a difference in the lives of students and the community it serves” (UNCG, 2012). In 2009, faculty voted to approve the inclusion of community engagement in the university-level promotion and tenure guidelines. By 2014, all 54 departments and seven schools and colleges had convened conversations with the charge to align unit and department level policies with the university policy. UNCG is the only institution known to have revised and aligned its promotion and tenure policies at all levels of the university to incorporate community engagement across the faculty roles – in teaching, research/creative activity, and service.

The research team’s study examines the policy changes that occurred at UNCG between 2009 and 2017, with special focus on the years between 2010, when the policy was adopted at the university level, and 2014 when all units and departments had aligned with the university guidelines. The study examines policy content and the alignment between the department, unit, and university-level guidelines. The goals of the study were to gain insight into how units and

departments revised policy language to integrate community engagement, and the extent to which these articulations align with community engagement principles and practices per literature in the field. Guiding questions include, how did units and departments define community engagement? Is community engagement integrated into the three main areas of faculty work: teaching, research/creative activity and service? What are the disciplinary variations in the framing of community engagement?

A guiding framework for the research study is the concept of *democratic engagement* described by Saltmarsh and Hartley (2011) as “the capacity to learn in the company of others and not to rely solely on the expertise of the academy” (p. 18). Democratic engagement is characterized by a clear purpose of promoting the public good; relevant processes for enacting the purpose; and as a challenge to the expert epistemology in higher education through recognition of community knowledge.

Drawing on previous scholarship (e.g., O’Meara, Eatman & Peterson, 2015), preliminary findings from our research indicate that revised guidelines should:

- Provide language of community engagement **in college and department level policies**.
- Clearly articulate a **definition of scholarship** that is not synonymous with the term research, but instead embraces diverse forms of faculty roles, scholarly approaches, methods, audiences for impact, and products.
- Clearly **define** community engagement as distinct in purpose and process from other forms of scholarly work (so that it is not confused with applied research, public scholarship, and other forms of experiential education).
- Recognize the relationship between community-engaged scholarship and the **integration of faculty roles**.
- Address who is considered a **peer** in peer-review.
- Clearly identify the “**products**” of community engaged scholarship (providing a range of scholarly artifacts beyond peer-reviewed journal articles).
- Question the use of the term “**rigor**” and how and where it is used, and instead, providing guidance around standards of “**quality scholarship**”, which can be applied across a continuum of diverse scholarly approaches and products.
- Clarify measures of **impact** of scholarship, which take into account diverse audiences that may include but which extend beyond academic or disciplinary communities.
- Provide **guidance for the evaluation** of community-engaged scholarship.
- Recognize the role and contribution of **inter- and trans-disciplinary knowledge and scholarship** in fulfilling the mission’s tripartite mission of teaching, research and service.

Using the above considerations as markers, UNCG tenure and promotion guidelines were examined to ascertain the ways in which policies aligned with the values and characteristics of democratic engagement (i.e., purpose and process). The research team created a matrix to code and capture information to assess how, where, and with what emphasis community engagement is incorporated into each unit’s guidelines and into the university-wide guidelines. A priori codes (see bold font terms above) were used to examine policies across unit guidelines. The team collectively discussed the results to come up with preliminary findings.

Initial findings will contribute to further research in order to build a broad and deep picture of UNCG's tenure and promotion guidelines (and commitment to community engagement). Thus far, the team's findings are:

1. The framing of community engagement at the university level may not provide the clarity needed for consistent translation and alignment with the unit and departmental level policies. This lack of clear framing at the university level has implications for the translation of community engagement in college and departmental guidelines.
2. Community engagement is often described through activities and products/outcomes, and not through a conceptual understanding of a process for bringing together academic knowledge with knowledge assets in the community for the purpose of improving the campus mission of generating and disseminating knowledge through the practice of research and teaching.
3. The concept of the public good and/or the purpose of community engagement to promote the public good is not articulated in the guidelines.
4. Few departments reference their respective disciplinary associations in describing the purpose and process of community engagement.
5. Recognition of community engagement as an aspect of faculty work seems to diminish with higher faculty rank.
6. Some departments chose to incorporate language about community engagement directly from the university-wide policy, while others chose to articulate and integrate community engagement more broadly, and sometimes not explicitly.

While the research team will continue to build upon these findings, it is clear that they are significant not only for UNCG but for the field of community engagement and for higher education in general. What is most significant is that becoming a community engaged campus through incorporating community engagement into individual units' tenure and promotion guidelines is a complicated process. In the case of UNCG, this is due in part to the autonomy of individual departments; the absence of a clear definition, purpose and process for community engagement; and the lack of a conceptual understanding of how to implement community engagement in a democratic way.

References

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Practice Applying these Lessons to a P&T Policy

Below are some key areas and questions to consider when developing new or revising existing promotion and tenure guidelines to recognize and reward community engagement accurately and equitably. This work is still under development, and the research team welcomes feedback and suggestions (contact emjanke@uncg.edu or john.saltmarsh@umb.edu).

1. Terms and Definitions

- What term(s) are used to refer to community engagement, and how, if at all, are the terms defined?
 - What term(s) is appropriate?
 - Does the definition align with Carnegie standards: partnerships for mutual benefit, reciprocal exchange of knowledge?
 - Does the definition clearly differentiate CE from other forms of applied research, public scholarship, and other forms of experiential education?

2. Type of Faculty Activity

- Is there recognition of integration of faculty scholarship across roles: T/R/S?
- Is CE articulated in each of the three areas of faculty work, including:
 1. Community Engaged Teaching
 2. Community Engaged Research and Creative Activity
 3. Community Engaged Service
- If CE is articulated within an area of faculty work, is it incorporated among other forms of scholarly work, or is it articulated separately?

3. Framing in terms of Knowledge Integration/Creation

- Is CE described as a form of multi-, inter-, or trans-disciplinary scholarship?

4. Peer Review

- Is the selection of peer reviewers aligned to the type of scholarship and impact aims of the scholar's work, such that a range of individuals may appropriately offer peer review.

5. Products

- Are a range of scholarly “**products**” - beyond peer-reviewed journal articles and books described as eligible scholarship for review?

6. Rigor and Quality

- How is the quality of the scholarly process defined across all types of scholarship, and are terms such as *rigor* or *quality* well defined?

7. Impact

- How is the **impact** of research is determined as it relates to all types of scholarship, including but not exclusively as it relates to community-engaged scholarship?