

MSU Position Statement on Outreach and Engagement

Submitted by the Outreach and Engagement Council – June 2013

The Outreach and Engagement Council was established to strategically champion engagement at Montana State University (MSU). The Council acknowledges the critical role and value of service, outreach and engagement at MSU and exists to support faculty, staff and students as they commit to this strategic goal. In support of MSU's land-grant mission, this position paper is intended to advance the understanding and practice of service, outreach, and engagement in fulfillment of the Strategic Plan goals. In the MSU Strategic Plan "Mountains and Minds: Learners and Leaders," engagement is defined as "the collaboration between MSU and its local, state, national, and global communities for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity (Carnegie Foundation, 2006). Engagement, a form of scholarship that bridges teaching, research and service, brings the university's intellectual resources to bear on societal needs (Association of Public and Land Grant University's Council on Engagement and Outreach (APLU CEO)." The plan's stated goal for engagement reads as follows:

"Goal: Members of the Montana State University community will be leaders, scholars and engaged citizens of their local, national and global communities, working together with community partners to exchange and apply knowledge and resources to improve the human prospect."

Creating Common Language

We acknowledge that the terms used here can be interpreted in many ways. The Council will be using the following definitions for guidance.

- **What is Service?** Service involves participating in the kinds of work that typically occur in maintaining and running the academic institution, civic life of communities, or professional associations.
- **What is Service Learning?** Service learning at MSU is defined as a teaching method that utilizes student involvement in community service to meet instructional objectives of a course. Students apply information from a class in authentic settings while addressing real needs of the community that have been identified by the community.
- **What is Outreach?** Outreach refers to the provision of programs, services, activities, and/or expertise to those outside the *traditional* university community of faculty, staff, and campus students. Outreach is typically one-way, with the university being the provider of knowledge or expertise to enrich the public good.
- **What is Engagement?** Engagement involves a partnership in which there is **mutually beneficial, two-way interaction** that is most often between the university (students, faculty, and staff) and other communities. Engagement takes many forms and may evolve from service and outreach activities. Engagement is distinguished by at least four foundational characteristics. Ideally, 1) engagement involves individual or University scholarly expertise, knowledge, professional skills, or resources, 2) cuts across the mission of teaching, research, and service, 3) is reciprocal and mutually beneficial, and 4) embraces the values of a land grant institution.

What does it mean to be an “Engaged University”?

This overview is designed to provide some common understandings and language about what it means to be an engaged university. It is informed by the Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement which MSU received in 2010, as well as literature on the scholarship of university engagement. For Montana State University, the working definition of engagement *is meaningful and mutually beneficial partnerships and collaborations* that occur beyond the traditional classroom and/or research lab. It is-

- That aspect of research that makes what we discover useful beyond the academic community.
- That aspect of teaching that enables learning beyond the traditional classroom and campus walls.
- That aspect of service that directly benefits our communities.
- That aspect of involvement in a co-curricular experience that makes meaningful contributions to a collaborative effort resulting in mutual benefit.

Outreach and engagement is not new. It is at the heart of what land-grant universities already do and encompasses the use of teaching, research, and service to address societal issues in partnership with the broader world. An engaged institution designs its teaching, research, and service functions as a collaborative and productive partner with internal and external communities.

What does it mean to be engaged individually, as a department or as a unit? Engagement has the following criteria:

- Working collaboratively with an organization, colleague, or entity that is generally outside the academic community. Examples of this may include working with teachers in K-12, a community group, a governmental agency, or a professional from your discipline.
- Bringing disciplinary expertise to this partnership. Your knowledge as a faculty, staff, or student of Montana State University contributes to the partnership.
- Engagement is a part of your research, teaching, and/or service. You are helping to make what you discovered through research useful, you are creating learning opportunities for citizens in off-campus environments or you are providing a discipline-related service to the community.
- Each partner respects the contributions of and learns from the other(s).
- Every partnership is unique and based on the needs of the partners. There are various ways to be engaged.

Service, outreach and engagement are not mutually exclusive activities. All have value, and each has an appropriate time and place. At any given time, there are many ways that individuals, departments, units, and other groups may be involved across the spectrum of service, outreach and engagement. The ultimate goal of service, outreach, and engagement is to create a more engaged MSU comprised of “leaders, scholars and engaged citizens” seeking to improve life for our constituents and communities around us.

Reference

Fitzgerald, H. E., Bruns, K., Sonka, S., Furco, A., & Swanson, L. (2012). The centrality of engagement in higher education. *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*, 16(3), 7-28.