Telling Stories, Making Meaning: Communicating about Community-Engaged Scholarship and University Outreach

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Overview

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Michigan State University

Institutional History and Identity

- Founded in 1855 and became Pioneer Land Grant (1862)
  - Developed model for national cooperative extension system (1907)
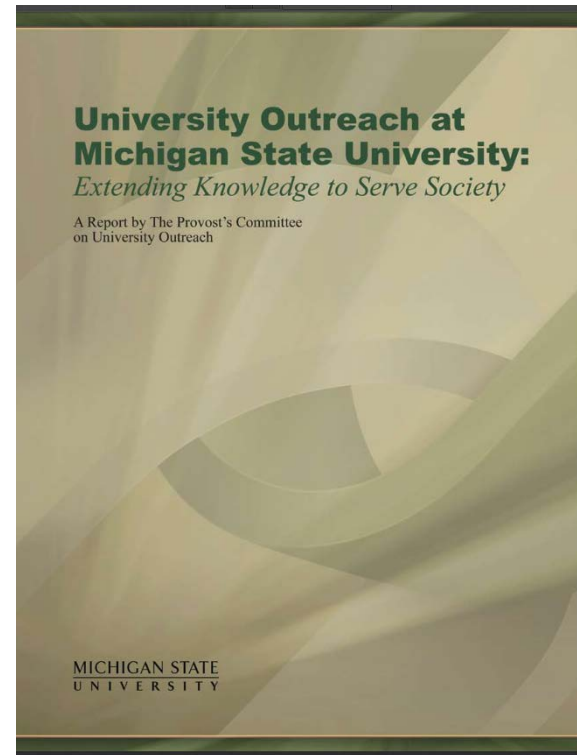- AAU Research University (1964)

MSU Today

- 17 degree-granting colleges
  - Includes three medical colleges and an affiliated law college
  - More than 200 programs of study
  - $584 Million in sponsored research (2014-2015)
- 12,100 employees
  - 5,300 faculty members and academic appointees
  - 6,800 support staff members
- 50,543 students
  - 39,143 Undergraduate
  - 11,400 Graduate and graduate professional
  - 27,475 student placements in community-engaged learning and/or community service (2015-2016)
- Large, single campus with community-based hubs for research, teaching, and service across Michigan and abroad

Conceptualizing Outreach and Engagement

Outreach and Engagement is defined as "a scholarly endeavor that cuts across research [and creative activities], teaching, and service. It involves generating, transmitting, applying, and preserving knowledge for the direct benefit of external audiences in ways that are consistent with university and unit missions."

Provost's Committee on University Outreach (1993)

University Outreach at Michigan State University:
Extending Knowledge to Serve Society

A Report by The Provost's Committee on University Outreach

MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY

Key concepts
- Scholarly
- Cross-cutting, not new synonym for service

Diffusion of Innovations, Communication, and Culture Change

W. K. Kellogg Foundation Lifelong Education Grant (1988)

Creation of executive university outreach and engagement leadership role and academic support unit in Provost's office (1991)

- Three original departments, today 14
- Campus and community networks
- Grant programs
- Assessment guidance
- Re-appointment, promotion, and tenure changes
- Publications
- Campus-wide data collection regimes
- Events, conferences, festivals
- Awards and recognitions programs
- Faculty and professional development programs

Continuing executive support
- University strategic imperatives
- World Grant Ideal

Roles of Communications Offices

Central Communications Office
- Officially sanctioned institutional communication organ
- Close ties to President's office and executive initiatives
- Organized as "Communication and Brand Strategy" office
- Research-informed strategies
- Provides leadership for campus-wide communicators network

College and Major Administrative Unit Communications
- De-centralized research intensive institution
  - Independent colleges led by strong deans
  - College-level communicators
  - Some center, institute, and department level communications
- Major non-college units also manage communications (e.g., Alumni Association, Development, Research, others)

University Outreach and Engagement's Communication and Information Technology Division
- Charged with playing proactive role in advancing and promoting a culture supportive of community-engaged scholarship

Communications Audiences and Goals

UOE Communication and Information Technology develops communications products for a variety of audiences

- **Students** – Participation appeals

- **Public** (general and targeted communities) – Public access program promotions and public awareness sponsorships and advertisements

- **Stakeholders** (governmental, NGO, alumni, and donors) – Data reports, stories, maps

- **Higher Education Leaders** – Self-studies (e.g., accreditation, Carnegie Community Engagement Classification, and other institutional recognitions) and consulting presentations and materials

- **MSU Leaders** – Briefing materials, longitudinal data, planning support materials

- **MSU Faculty and Academic Staff** – Everything above, and materials to support faculty development, recognition, networking (topical, geographical, both), and culture

  - Viewed as a key audience for affecting long-term institutional commitment to a culture supportive of community-engaged scholarship

One Strategy: *Engaged Scholar Magazine* and *E-Newsletter*

Engaged Scholar Magazine (2006-present)
- Annual print publication
- Total run of 8,500
  - Mailed to 5,300 MSU faculty and academic staff
  - Also mailed to nearly 1,200 non-MSU postal addresses
- Typically contains 9-12 features per volume
  - Includes think piece, and student scholar and community voice stories
  - Supplemented with boxed info and featurettes, campus data, and UOE news

Engaged Scholar E-Newsletter (2008-present)
- Companion e-publication distributed quarterly over the academic year
- Total distribution to approximately 3,700 email addresses
  - Approximately 35% are e-mailed to non-MSU addresses
- Contains three features per issue (12/volume)
  - Includes "Priorities" piece with focus on economic development
  - Supplemented with announcements and events

Primary Audience

Primarily published for MSU faculty and academic staff

Feature stories about the University's engaged scholars form the core of the publications

The goal is to advance and promote a culture supportive of community-engaged scholarship and university outreach by identifying and developing stories of the best and most interesting work of this kind being undertaken by MSU people, and disseminating them widely and often

Some academics may be interested in becoming community-engaged, but simply don't know what that might look like in their area of work

Story Selection

Any faculty, academic staff member, or student may be considered for a feature, but the emphasis is on tenure system faculty

- More difficult to identify and cultivate for stories, but critical for affecting faculty culture

Featured work should

- Reflect mutual benefit and reciprocity in partnering
- Provide evidence of quality
  - Addresses **significant** problem/issue
  - Undertaken with intentional sensitivity to **context**
  - Grounded in current **scholarship** and appropriate scholarly practices
  - Produces positive **impacts**
- Be interesting (e.g., newsworthy, personal dimension, unexpected, etc.)

Diversity should be represented across features

- Societal issues
- Forms of community-engaged scholarship
- Student involvement
- Demographic and identity variables (e.g., racial, ethnic, gender, etc.)
- Units and disciplines

Story Selection: Diversity by College

Summary of Coverage by College: Numbers of Articles Published in the
Engaged Scholar Magazine* (v. 1-10) and *Engaged Scholar E-Newsletter* (v. 1–8)

College	Magazine	E-Newsletter	Total
College of Social Science	19	14	33
College of Agriculture and Natural Resources	13	14	27
College of Education	13	6	19
College of Human Medicine	8	10	18
College of Communication Arts and Sciences	8	8	16
College of Arts and Letters	10	5	15
College of Natural Science	8	6	14
Eli Broad College of Business	5	8	13
College of Engineering	6	7	13
College of Osteopathic Medicine	4	5	9
College of Veterinary Medicine	3	3	6
Residential College in the Arts and Humanities	4	2	6
College of Music	2	3	5
College of Nursing	2	3	5
James Madison College	2	2	4
College of Law	2	2	4
Lyman Briggs College	1	1	2

* Counts include articles with joint coverage (double counted, one for each unit).

Story Development

Mixed orientation to the writing
- Journalism – Aiming to inform
- Public relations – Aiming to influence
- Instruction – Aiming to promote reflection and learning
- Special attention to the characteristics of community-engaged scholarship

Language usage
- Primary audience is highly educated, but not expert on the content of every story
- NPR style language

Credibility
- Identify the motivation or source of the community engagement in scholars' experiences, curiosities, interests, opportunities, and/or biographies
- Include community voice
- Ask critical questions
- Maintain authorial distance from subject of stories

Reference

Michigan State University, Provost's Committee on University Outreach. (1993). *University outreach at Michigan State University: Extending knowledge to serve society*. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University.

Engaged Scholar Subscriptions

Request subscriptions for the *Engaged Scholar Magazine* at:
http://engagedscholar.msu.edu/magazine/subscription.aspx

Request subscriptions for the *Engaged Scholar E-Newsletter* at:
http://engagedscholar.msu.edu/enewsletter/subscription.aspx

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