

Assessing and Valuing Community-Engaged Scholarship at the University of Utah

Produced by the Ad Hoc Working Group on Community Engaged Scholarship

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INTRODUCTION

The University of Utah (U) is part of an urgent national conversation about the public purpose of higher education, and its role in addressing deep challenges to our democratic society. Through Community Engaged-Scholarship (CES), the university fulfills its mission to serve the people of Utah and the world, and advances its strategic goals in the realms of knowledge development, community engagement, student success and institutional sustainability. The U is one of over 350 colleges and universities to sign on to the 2015 Campus Compact Presidents' Declaration on the Civic Responsibility of Higher Education, which states:

“This country cannot afford to educate a generation that acquires knowledge without ever understanding how that knowledge can benefit society or how to influence democratic decision-making. . . Higher education—its leaders, students, faculty, staff, trustees, and alumni—remains a key institutional force in our culture that can respond, and can do so without a political agenda and with the intellectual and professional capacities today’s challenges so desperately demand.”

One of the core strategies for connecting academic work with these public responsibilities is through community engaged scholarship. As at higher education institutions across the country, a persistent institutional hurdle has been the difficulty of appropriately assessing and valuing CES within systems of retention, promotion and tenure (RPT). A number of major Universities—including Michigan State University, Portland State University, and Arizona State University—have been leaders.

The U is poised to become another national leader in CES. Holding Carnegie Classifications as a Community-Engaged Research I University, the U is home to numerous scholars who, through collaboration with community partners, are simultaneously advancing knowledge in their discipline or field and having an impact on the health and well-being of the communities with which they work.

The U’s institutional commitment to CES is captured in the work of two University bodies: the Lowell Bennion Community Service Center and University Neighborhood Partners. Units at the U have also made advances in this area. For example, the School of Dance, the Department of Family & Consumer Studies, and the College of Social Work have become early adopters of thinking and language addressing CES as a part RPT guidelines in ways appropriate to their particular discipline or field. Other units have sought counsel from the U about how to best address this topic within the RPT guidelines, particularly in research and creative work.

In response to this growing call for guidance, and as a follow-up to the 2011 Faculty Task Force Report on Community Engagement, in January 2016, SVPAA Ruth Watkins convened the *Ad Hoc Working Group on Community-Engaged Scholarship*. Our charge was to offer recommendations on how to appropriately assess and value CES within the university's structures, policies, and procedures. This document summarizes our recommendations and guidance, based on best practices in CES and in the particular context of the U. If adopted and implemented, these recommendations could enhance the school's ability to meet its mission and strategic goals and position the U as a national innovator and model in conducting, assessing and valuing CES.

COMMUNITY ENGAGED SCHOLARSHIP

This report is focused on how to value CES appropriately within the "research and other creative activity" category of faculty workload as defined by University Policy 6-303.III.A.2.a.i. We define CES as:

Investigation, analysis, and the transformation and dissemination of knowledge based on community-informed, reciprocal partnerships involving the university and community members. CES contributes to both the public good and the university mission, is rooted in disciplinary or field-based expertise, uses appropriate methodologies, and involves public dissemination of products that can be peer reviewed.

DOCUMENTING COMMUNITY ENGAGED SCHOLARSHIP

Community engaged scholars seek to reach two different audiences with their research: scholarly peers and community members. Therefore, the forms of documentation and dissemination for CES are necessarily different. Appropriately assessing CES involves recognizing a spectrum of documentation that is appropriate to each discipline. Traditional scholarly products such as journal articles, books, and conference presentations are typically more easily accepted as documenting CES. Other documentation found in websites, blogs, and online journals are more difficult because they are less traditional. These products may require alternative ways of assessing impact as discussed below.

ASSESSING COMMUNITY ENGAGED SCHOLARSHIP

CES is assessed according to the same overarching criteria as other forms of scholarship: significance, quality, and impact. However, for CES, these criteria can manifest differently than what has been traditionally viewed as academic scholarship.

- CES can be assessed for its **significance** to scholarly communities *and* to the external communities that it seeks to engage. It should address questions of import to scholars and community members, and produce results that advance scholarly knowledge while being of benefit to community partners.
- CES can be assessed for its **quality** in terms of both scholarly rigor *and* community engagement. High-quality CES is rooted in both up-to-date scholarly research and community knowledge; involves sustained, reciprocal relationships; utilizes an asset based approach to communities; engages community partners in decision making throughout the research process; and is carried out ethically and responsibly.
- CES can be assessed for its **impact** on scholarly knowledge in a discipline, field, or methodology *and* for its impact on communities. Community impacts can include improvements in community-identified issues, increases in community health and wellness, and increases in community capacity. In assessing the impact of CES on communities, it is important that local and regional impacts are valued equally

alongside national or international impact. More traditional scholarly products, as noted above, can be assessed under the typical approach of assessing one's scholarly work. Systems for reviewing non-traditional research products have begun to emerge. The Review Standards Committee should work with those entities and senior faculty in CES to provide the most current information in assessment options for each discipline.

PEER REVIEW OF COMMUNITY ENGAGED SCHOLARSHIP

Peer review is essential for the internal evaluation of the quality and impact of any candidate's scholarship. Nationally recognized experts in the candidate's discipline are typically asked to assist with this process. Adequately assessing the quality, significance, and impact of CES requires making peer review more inclusive. In the RPT process, we solicit the input from scholars who have a reputation for conducting high-quality research in the field scholarship (e.g., external letters of evaluation). In addition to finding CES scholars to evaluate work, units should also solicit input regarding CES from community/public leaders who have experience working with academic researchers on engaged scholarship projects. Such Community Peer Review is appropriate to assess: 1) the effectiveness of collaborative research methods; 2) the impact of applied research on publics; and/or 3) overall professional outreach and service to communities or organizations. Such review can be used as part of the overall review of candidates' work and in conjunction with traditional criteria and reviewers.

Reviewers in this capacity may include, but are not limited to: directors of nonprofit organizations, editors of journals focused on community engagement, policymakers, community leaders, or directors of community-engagement centers (e.g., the Bennion Center and University Neighborhood Partners at the U, the Haas Center for Public Service at Stanford University, and the Ginsberg Center for Community Service and Learning at the University of Michigan).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: Each tenure-granting unit will consider how CES fits into the three categories of research, teaching, and service explicitly in their RPT guidelines during their next review and approval of their RPT guidelines.

1.a. These units will consider how CES is addressed explicitly in hiring (e.g., explicit expectations in hiring letters) and mentoring processes.

1.c. Each unit will also make clear how community engagement and community-engaged learning is accounted for within the activities of research, teaching, and service.

Recommendation 2: The Review Standards Committee will offer structural supports and resources to assist units as they promote and integrate CES into RPT processes.

2.a. The Review Standards Committee will provide templates and advice for departments and colleges appropriate to each discipline and field, and will facilitate each department's ability to meaningfully operationalize and address community-engaged scholarship in RPT guidelines.

Recommendation 3: The University will continue to support community engagement across the university. The Associate Vice President for Faculty will work with the Review Standards Committee to help communicate the value of CES and to continue to support faculty who pursue CES.