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Judith A. Ramaley
Portland State University

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Seizing the Moment: Creating a Changed Society and University through Outreach

Judith Ramaley¹

Dr. Judith Ramaley presented a thought-provoking keynote address on October 7 at the Outreach Scholarship 2002: Catalyst for Change conference. Many conference attendees requested a written version of her address to share with colleagues, and we are pleased to be able to offer the remarks to the journal readership.

Abstract

This conference is built on two very interesting premises; first, that university outreach can change society and second, that outreach can also change the university. What is the mechanism by which this mutual influence can occur? What does the university offer the community, and what does the community offer the university? The short answer is—the opportunity to learn in the company of others in a situation where learning has consequences.

Why Do Universities and Colleges Develop Partnerships with the Community?

In the past several years, the importance of incorporating civic responsibility into both institutional missions and the curriculum has acquired much higher visibility. It is difficult to keep up with the articles and books being written about civic responsibility, public scholarship, service-learning, and community-based learning. Many colleges and universities are now experimenting with a variety of approaches to learning communities, service-learning, community-university partnerships, collaborative research models, outreach, and engagement that bring together students, faculty, and community participants to work on issues that will affect the quality of life in communities and create opportunities for others.

Several years ago, in a report based on the experience of 120 colleges and universities that had participated in the Pew Roundtables, the Institute for Research on Higher Education at the

¹The opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and may not reflect the views of the National Science Foundation.

University of Pennsylvania outlined three dominant themes that initiated and then sustained a drive toward institutional change at these institutions (*IRHE 1996*). They were:

1. The need to ensure continued financial viability and continued support from external constituents;
2. The need to focus on the enhancement of the curriculum and pedagogy and on the fostering of successful student learning;
3. The need to establish an institutional culture that is more conducive to change and capable of overcoming barriers to action.

For many institutions facing these challenges, increasing faculty, staff, and student community involvement that is mission-related makes a great deal of sense. The goals of these strategies vary, but they tend to be mutually reinforcing.

The expected consequences of service-learning, outreach, and campus-community partnerships include:

1. Preparing students to be good citizens by providing them ways to help the institution itself be a good citizen;
2. Fostering and renewing bonds of trust in the community, "social capital"—and using the neutrality of the campus to provide a common ground where differences of opinion and advocacy for particular points of view can be addressed in an open and constructive way and where people with similar goals can come together and create ways to work together;
3. Creating leadership development opportunities for students and fostering a commitment to social and civic responsibility;
4. Enhancing the employability of graduates by providing opportunities to build a strong résumé and to explore career goals;
5. Promoting learning both for students and for community members;
6. Playing a role in creating capacity in the community to work on complex societal problems;
7. Designing a more effective way for the campus to contribute to economic and community development;
8. In many cases, accomplishing a campus mission of service.

Over the past several years, I have participated in a number of fora that have reflected upon transformational change. All have focused in one way or another on campus-community relationships and the creation of a new base of knowledge and a capacity to function in a collaborative mode. One of the most powerful ways to create the capacity for intentional and constructive change is to open up both the university and its partners to the learning opportunities created by engagement.

What Is Engagement?

In its report on *The Engaged Institution*, the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities defined "engagement" as the redesign of teaching, research and extension and service functions to become more sympathetically and productively involved with community concerns and needs. Although the concept of engagement is still evolving, several common elements are beginning to emerge

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from the analysis of the experiences of many colleges and universities with their communities. A fully realized university-community relationship has at the very least the following features:

- A common agenda and sharing of responsibility as well as risk and reward;
- An ability to share power and resources equitably with the community;
- Extraordinary community-based service-learning opportunities for students that require faculty and administrators to be equally open and responsive to the interests and concerns of their students and of the community;
- The inclusion of community concerns as a legitimate set of expectations about what the goals and successful outcomes of a community-university partnership or engagement will be.

In sum, engagement is reciprocal, requires the creation of a shared agenda and must be mutually beneficial to all participants.

It should, in short, generate something of real value in supporting community development along with the enrichment of the student experience and the deepening of the scholarly interest of both faculty and students in the problems presented by the community experience.

The Characteristics of a Learning Organization

The people in a learning organization exhibit a number of shared features and habits:

- A discipline of reflection (using real information rather than perceptions);
- New patterns of conversation;
- Adoption of manageable risk and a commitment to experimentation;
- Creation of new information and new patterns of information flow.

According to David Garvin (1995), a learning organization is skilled at:

- Creating, acquiring, interpreting, and transferring knowledge and at modifying its behavior to reflect new knowledge and insights;
- Systematic problem solving;
- Experimentation with new approaches;
- Learning from past experience and past history;
- Learning from experiences and best practices of others;
- Transferring knowledge quickly and efficiently throughout the organization.

To this list, I would add that any form of organizational change is a scholarly act (Ramaley 2000) and involves all aspects of scholarship as it is now being defined: discovery, integration, interpretation, and application approached with rigor, integrity, and respect for those affected by the work. In a true learning organization:

- Everyone is a learner and can contribute to the quality, impact, and value of the work that the organization does.
- Integrated thinking and acting must occur at all levels.

The role of the leader, at any level, is to build a shared vision, to bring to the surface and challenge prevailing mental models,

and to foster more systematic patterns of thinking (Senge 1990). This kind of leadership causes people to explore their assumptions and either validate them or work on more effective replacements for their earlier ways of thinking about the institution and its purposes.

What Kind of Democracy Shall We Work Towards?

Guarasci and Cornwell (1997) call for a new working model of democracy, "a wholly different ideal of the democratic community in which both difference and connection can be held together yet understood to be at times necessarily separate, paradoxical and in contradiction to one another." In this new democratic accommodation to our growing diversity and multiplicity, we will need to build a society in which any individual "may hold many sub-identities at once and in which power, prestige, and social standing are multi-plicitous and nonhierarchical." We must simultaneously be connected and distinct and singular. An educational institution can model this broader and more inclusive concept of democracy and civic virtue. This is what we mean by calling on colleges and universities to exercise their civic responsibilities.

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Democracy, as well as education itself, must be a "way of life" built on the concepts of growth and individuality and, as John Dewey would say, an ongoing experiment in associated living. The goal of education is not just to produce informed citizens but more profoundly, to inculcate a democratic character through moral education as well as through what Dewey called "occupations."² In fact, for Dewey, all education is moral education; in contemporary terms, to be good citizens we must remain learners and continue the experiment in associated living that we begin as students. One of the results of engagement is that the participants together, no matter what their age or prior experience and expertise.

²When John Dewey wrote about "occupations," he was not talking about vocational education. He meant any activity that engages the whole child and draws upon his or her natural interests in the hopes of building genuine curiosity about intellectual matters (Boisvert 1998, 103).

What is Civic Virtue?

Civic virtue has classically been defined as both knowledge of the public good and the sustained desire to achieve it (*Dahl 1995*). Underlying this definition is the supposition that community leaders have “both the opportunity and incentives to acquire the necessary knowledge and the predisposition to act steadily on the basis of that knowledge.” In this era of information explosion in the absence of understanding and wisdom, where might a citizen acquire the knowledge required to exercise civic responsibility today? In a learning alliance with a college or university David Mathews (*1996*) lays out a picture of a true civic society for our era: “Civil societies become democratic when there are opportunities for people to learn the importance of listening to all views, even those they dislike, of ‘working through’ conflicting approaches to solving a problem, and of building common ground for action.”

What Does it Mean to be a Responsible Citizen?

We do not all agree on what it means to be a responsible citizen or what the civic virtues were that we wanted to model and then instill in our students. We do, however, all agree that public life in this country is changing and that the very nature of the “public realm” itself, where all of us come together to contribute to the building of a just and peaceful community, is in need of repair. We also agree that colleges and universities must be significant players in creating such public spaces and in generating and modeling civic responsibility—both on and off campus.

A college or university is, in many ways, a “public space,” designed to help us develop shared purposes and pursue shared goals. One element we all share is our commitment to undergraduate education and the outcomes of the student experience. We differ, however, in the extent to which we view research and public service as essential means to accomplish our mission. An institution that wishes to be engaged and responsible must rethink some fundamental issues, such as how knowledge will be created in the future, what the role of faculty will be, what the goals of the curriculum ought to be, how the curriculum should be designed to foster civic responsibility, and how to form and then sustain meaningful, long-term alliances and partnerships that can promote community capacity to work in democratic ways. The answers to these questions at a research university may differ from the responses of a private liberal arts college, a regional university, at a community college, but we all need to find answers that authentically reflect our mission and purposes.

- What does it mean to honor our avowed mission to prepare our students to lead creative, productive, and responsible lives?
- What does it mean to renew our democratic way of life and reassert our role of social stewardship as “vital agents and architects of a flourishing democracy?”
- How will a commitment to civic engagement and civic responsibility manifest itself in the daily life, structure, and decisions that we make on our campuses?
- How will the experience of engagement affect the community?

What Does It Mean for a College or University to Embrace Its Civic Responsibility?

An institution that embraces its civic responsibilities seeks to play a role in generating a renewal of democracy through our expectations for ourselves as scholars and administrators, our aspirations for our students, and the nature and intentions of our own institutional relationships with the broader society of which we are an integral part. This commitment yields both tangible results, actions that address specific community-identified problems, and intangible results the practice of the habits of learning and interaction that our concept of democracy requires of us.

The most fundamental means by which any educational institution can enhance civic responsibility (1) finding a means to link learning and community life through the design of the curriculum and (2) serving as a center and resource for community building on the community's terms. Beyond these fundamental means, each institution can use its distinctive strengths based on its traditions, institutional history, and resource base to contribute through scholarship and outreach or engagement to the strengthening of community life and community capacity to identify and solve problems. In all cases, the institution is helping its students, its faculty and staff, and the citizens of the communities it serves learn how to make informed choices together, an essential skill of civic responsibility and a core competence of a civil society (*Mathews 1996*).

The Role of Partnerships in Economic and Community Development

As we enter a new century, we can discern the outlines of a new approach to regional development elicited by the increasingly multidimensional and interrelated challenges facing communities and regions. Collaborations and long-term partnerships are especially

appropriate for addressing the reform of large-scale systems, such as education, health care, public safety, economic development and job creation, corrections and social services, and workforce development. At the same time, the experiences of partnership nurture core democratic skills. There are a number of lessons to be drawn from the partnerships that have been formed in recent years. At its best, any partnership, regardless of the reasons for its existence, is essentially a learning collaborative or learning community that behaves in the ways that any learning organization behaves. Like any such entity, a good partnership:

- Promotes a discipline of reflection (using real information rather than perceptions);
- Encourages new patterns of conversation that bring university and community participants together in new ways;
- Permits a community to accept a manageable amount of risk and a commitment to experimentation;
- Creates new information and new patterns of information flow.

Each partnership has unique elements shaped by the history, capacity, cultures, missions, expectations, and challenges of each participating group or organization. What must remain as a constant, however, is that any partnership must be based on the academic strengths and philosophy of the university. As another constant, the needs and capacities of the community must define the approach that the university takes to forming a partnership.

- An ideal partnership matches the academic strengths and goals of the university with the assets and interests of the community.
- There is no such thing as a universal "community." It takes time to understand what elements make up a particular community and how people experience membership in the community. It is not easy to define who can speak for the community, just as the university itself is not monolithic. Often partnerships are fragmented by competing interests in the community itself.
- Unless the institution as a whole embraces the value and validity of engagement as legitimate scholarly work and provides both moral support and concrete resources to sustain it, engagement will remain individually defined and sporadic. Such limited interventions cannot influence larger systems on a scale necessary to address community issues.
- It is important to take time to think about what the university actually can bring to a partnership. Universities with limited research

capacity and few graduate programs will find it difficult to provide the kinds of applied research and technical assistance that many communities need. Sometimes it is possible to make an alliance with a research university to broker and focus the research interests of faculty and graduate students on local problems. If sufficient research capability is not available, it is best to consider engagement as primarily a function of the curriculum.

A good collaboration will continue to evolve as a result of mutual learning. To be successful, a collaboration should be built on new patterns of information gathering, communication and reflection that allow all parties to participate in decision making and learning. This requires time and face-to-face interactions.

- Some communities are being partnered to the point of exhaustion. It is often necessary to identify ways to help community organizations and smaller agencies create the capacity to be an effective partner.

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- The early rush of enthusiasm can be replaced by fatigue and burnout unless the collaboration begins early on to identify and recruit additional talent to the project or the collaboration. This is true both within the university community, where a few dedicated faculty cannot be expected to carry the entire engagement and civic responsibility agenda, and within the broader community, where a small number of community leaders and volunteers cannot be expected to handle a sustained effort over time. Both the university and its partners need to find ways to involve a truly representative cross-section of the talent in the community.
- Like any other important effort, community partnerships must be accompanied by a strong commitment to a "culture of evidence." It is important to keep a running assessment of how well the partnership is working from the point of view of all participants.

The Realities of Community-Based Work

It is important for university people who are marching out to engage to take a moment to think about how outreach may be experienced by their community partners. It is a challenge to put together healthy and effective partnerships involving higher

education, government, and community members. The practical realities of building the framework and foundation for a healthy partnership often escape the notice of leadership. It is worth taking time to talk with people who do this kind of work and learning from them what it takes to make a collaboration thrive.

1. It takes time, much more time than you might expect, to build trust and to open up genuine communication across differences in social status, education, culture, and experience. It is often best to bring people together first and build an agenda later through dialogue and exploration. Asking people to react to a draft prepared beforehand will disenfranchise them and probably drive them away because they think the agenda and the purpose of the group is a "done deal."
2. People who are accustomed to different kinds of interactions and a quick pace of decision making often have trouble if things are muddy and confusing and it seems to be taking forever to work out goals and strategies. It is common at such times for people with higher education or government experience to leap immediately to a hierarchical model in which the participants are assigned roles such as chairperson. Hierarchies do not tap the natural leadership and responsibility of members of the group.
3. It is important to tap the natural leadership capacity of group members and draw out what they can contribute. Remember to recognize and draw upon the tacit knowledge that comes from the experience of the community members of the group. They think about and live the issues all the time; other participants from higher education, government, or business do not.
4. Groups that do not have a shared culture or agreed-upon ways of managing group clashes can be easily disrupted by one or more strong individuals or someone acting out of a strong personal agenda. In such a situation, consider breaking the group into smaller sub-units with specific tasks and then carefully introduce the group to new problem-solving skills.
5. Model genuine inclusion in all phases of a partnership. Do not get very far into a process before including participants from other organizations or the community. Think about how to pick people you will invite to participate.
6. Avoid the limitations of the "golden rule." The partner that has fiduciary responsibility for managing the resources

contributed to the project will tend to try to fit the project into forms that are measurable. Often these requirements shape the discussion and the terms of engagement in ways that are not effective responses to the needs and assets of the community involved and impose a worldview that is familiar and comfortable to only some of the participants.

Creating Conditions that Support Meaningful Involvement in Community Service and Support for an Engaged Campus Model

Significant change to incorporate a strong community base for research and education requires (1) the possibility of reward or benefit for faculty and staff; (2) individual influence and inspired leadership throughout the institution, not just at the top; (3) an institution that is responsive to the needs of the community it serves; (4) educational planning and purposefulness that recognize the value of active and responsible community service that has a real community impact; (5) a willingness to adopt a shared agenda and a shared resource base over which the institution has only partial control; and finally, (6) the capacity to change.

Regardless of local circumstances and institutional traditions and history, a few conditions must be in place for a community-based strategy to work.

1. Community-based work must be valued as a meaningful educational experience and a legitimate mode of scholarly work.
2. The evaluation of faculty and student work must include rigorous measures of the quality and impact of community-based scholarship. Professional service must be recognized as a component of staff work as well.
3. Mediating structures must be provided to help faculty and students identify community-based learning and research opportunities, and technical support must be available to help faculty and students use these opportunities and assess the results of such programs, both from their own point of view and from the perspectives of the community and its priorities and experiences.
4. Opportunities must be provided for faculty, staff, and students to develop the skills to participate in research and curricular programs in a collaborative mode with partners from different academic disciplines and with significant community involvement.

As the Presidents' Fourth of July Declaration on the Civic Responsibility of Higher Education made clear: We have a fundamental task to renew our role as agents of democracy. This task is both urgent and long-term.

What Might Be the Impact of Engagement on the University Partner?

The experience of engagement will become the pathway to a fresh interpretation of the twenty-first-century university. This conception rests on a rethinking of the core of the academy—namely, the nature of scholarship itself.

During its examination of the future of this nation's state and land-grant institutions, the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities reframed the classic triad of *research, teaching, and service* into a new framework of *discovery, learning, and engagement*. The reason for doing this was that the new terms describe shared activities, usually, but not always, led

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by faculty, that have shared consequences. The older terms tend to connote a one-way activity, generally conducted by experts. The new triad works well for describing the range of ways in which a college or university can incorporate good citizenship into its traditional work and move from an expert-centered model to an engagement model of partnership with the community.

Discovery can encompass community-based scholarship and the development of new knowledge through collaborations with community participants. *Learning* can be done in a way that links educational goals with the challenges of life. As John Dewey wrote, "Education is not preparation for life. Education is life itself." Common forms of engaged learning are service-learning and problem-based learning, both utilizing community issues as a starting point for accomplishing educational goals. *Engagement* can be achieved through community-university alliances and partnerships.

All three of these classic elements of campus life—discovery, learning and engagement—can be conducted in an "engaged mode." Whether it is discovery, learning, or engagement, the activity can be community-based. It can have shared goals that link the mission of a college or university with the goals of the community

Participants as well as an agreed-upon definition of success that will be meaningful to the institution and the community. An engaged activity can also be supported by a pooling of resources across sectors of the campus as well as within the community. When these features are present, the resulting partnership is likely to be mutually beneficial and can build the capacity and competence of all parties.

There are a number of lessons to keep in mind when developing sustainable partnerships that can support discovery, learning, and engagement in community settings (Holland and Ramaley 1998). As many of us have discovered, it is not easy to work in a collaborative way, but the rewards are well worth the effort. No other model affords the same rich context for exercising the habits of good citizenship or for exposing our students to the realities of the complexity of a democratic way of life. It is also true, however, that unless the institution as a whole embraces the value as well as the validity of engagement as legitimate scholarly work and provides both moral support and concrete financial resources to sustain this work, engagement will remain individually defined by the interests of committed faculty and sporadic in nature. Such limited interventions cannot influence larger systems on a scale necessary to address significant community issues. They also will not offer the stimulation and scope necessary to involve a significant proportion of the student body in meaningful public work. When embodied in the mission, values, structure, scholarly agenda, and educational philosophy of an institution, the concept of engagement can be truly transformational. As the ACE/Kellogg Project on Leadership and Institutional Transformation explains it (Eckel 2002), transformation:

1. Alters the culture of the institution by changing select underlying assumptions and institutional behaviors, processes, and products;
2. Is deep and pervasive, affecting the whole institution;
3. Is intentional;
4. Occurs consistently over time.

Drawing upon both the traditions of the land-grant movement and contemporary critiques of the land-grant university today, I would propose the following working definition of the defining qualities of a twenty-first-century university. To avoid the connotations and assumptions associated with the term "land-grant," I will use the term "engaged university" to describe the features of an institution committed to service to society.

- The primary purposes of the twenty-first-century engaged university are to conduct research on important problems, ideas, and questions; to promote the application of current knowledge to societal problems; and to prepare its students to address these issues through a curriculum that emphasizes scholarly work in both the liberal arts and the professions.
- Scholarly work consists of discovery, integration of new knowledge into an existing discipline or body of knowledge, interpretation to a variety of audiences and application of knowledge to a variety of contemporary questions. In an engaged university all faculty, staff, and students can and should engage in scholarly work, to address societal concerns or to strengthen the educational environment or to promote effective use of campus resources.
- The faculty, staff, and students will participate in diverse forms of scholarly work at different times in their careers. No single profile can accommodate disciplinary differences and individual interests effectively.
- The classic tripartite mission of research, instruction and service must support a full range of inquiry and application both within the curriculum and research environments created by the university and in field, community, and other applied settings. The university cannot and must not be insular. Scholarly work that involves instruction and research combined with service must be valued, rigorously reviewed, and effectively rewarded.
- Although many institutions are oriented to address directly the social and economic problems of our society, the research university is distinguished by the comprehensiveness of its academic mission and its range of graduate and undergraduate programs, by the effective integration of scholarship and service within both the curriculum and the research mission, and by integral involvement of students in the generation and application of knowledge.
- Success in the university of the future will be defined by the rigor of scholarly work, by the quality of the educational experience of undergraduate and graduate and professional students, by the effectiveness of the partnerships that link the university with the community, and by the impact of the institution on the quality of life of citizens of the state, the nation, and the world.

It is an exciting picture.

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About the Author

Dr. Judith A. Ramaley is assistant director, Education and Human Resources Directorate (EHR), the National Science Foundation. She is also Presidential Professor of Biomedical Sciences and Fellow of the Margaret Chase Smith Center for Public Policy at the University of Maine. Prior to joining NSF, Dr. Ramaley was president of the University of Vermont (UVM) and professor of biology from 1997 to 2001. Before coming to UVM, she was president and professor of biology at Portland State University in Portland, Oregon, for seven years. Dr. Ramaley has a special interest in higher education reform and has played a significant role in designing regional alliances to promote educational cooperation. She also has contributed to a national exploration of the changing nature of work and the workforce and of the role of higher education in the school-to-work agenda. She has played a national role in the exploration of civic responsibility and partnerships between higher education and society.