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# Collectivizing Our Impact: Engaging Departments and Academic Change

Kevin Kecskes

*Portland State University, kecskesk@pdx.edu*

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## Citation Details

Kecskes, K. (2015). Collectivizing our impact: Engaging departments and academic change. *Partnerships: A Journal of Service-Learning and Civic Engagement*, (6) 3.

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# Collectivizing our Impact: Enaging Departments and Academic Change

Kevin Kecskes

*Partnerships: A Journal of Service-Learning & Civic Engagement*  
Vol. 6, No. 3, Fall 2015

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**This article invites readers to consider foundational assumptions about community-engaged work. The author envisions a path forward to help “un-stall” the community engagement movement and to deepen and broaden practice. Connecting cutting edge thinking emerging out of the public, private, and nonprofit sectors – all suggesting the need to collectivize our work – the author argues in favor of refocusing community engagement efforts on the backbone of higher education: academic disciplines and departments. The article concludes with a composite vision, compiled from data and experiences collected at multiple postsecondary institutions in the United State and beyond, for a partnership landscape that positions the academic unit closer to the center of the community engagement enterprise.**

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Why, after 30 years of steady progress on the community engagement front in higher education, might this movement be “stalled,” according to several senior scholars?

Given the deeply collaborative nature of community-campus partnership work, might it be time for campuses to deemphasize individual faculty awards and focus instead more on supporting and celebrating collective efforts?

What might happen if community engagement support centers on campuses invited academic departments to openly discuss the public purposes of their disciplines?

What results might emerge, inside and outside of the academic unit, if departments publically identified their collective agenda; and further, if a community engagement agenda and primary community partners were positioned at or near its center?

What theoretical orientations might help us address Edwards’ (1999) observation: “The department is arguably the definitive locus of faculty culture.... We could have expected that reformers would have placed departmental reform at the core of their agenda; yet

just the opposite has occurred. There has been a noticeable lack of discussion of – or even new ideas about – departments’ role in reform.” (p. 267)

Why is departmental engagement so important; why now?

Recently, while providing opening remarks for a statewide institute for seasoned community-engaged faculty and service-learning professional staff, I politely invited participants to raise their hand if they had earned a doctorate. I raised my hand in unison with a hundred or so others that went up in the room. Then, I asked them to keep their hand raised if they had co-authored their dissertation. All hands went down, including mine. People laughed; it was a nervous laugh.

Last year, I gently reminded “my” community partner – an individual with whom I have been consistently partnering for many years and who directs an important office in Portland, Oregon’s City Hall – that the students in front of us, who were about to present their community-based research findings to a City Commissioner and members of the Mayor’s staff, were “our” students. He smiled; it was a nervous smile.

For over a decade, Portland State University hosted an annual “Civic Engagement Awards Celebration.” These events were not unlike hundreds that occur annually on campuses across the country today. These were joyous events; a time in the spring when the president, provost, deans, and many others could acknowledge exemplary community-engaged efforts of select faculty members and their community partners. When we launched a five-year “engaged department initiative” on campus involving 22 academic departments – replete with trainings, funding, support, and so on (Kecskes & Spring, 2006) – we added an associated category for departmental engagement to the annual event. We were surprised that, generally, few academic departments ever applied; one year, no departments initially applied. We were nervous. I believed then, as I do now, that this vanguard effort was ahead of its time. The good news is that the times are changing.

These vignettes provide clues for scholars who question why the higher education community engagement movement might be stalled (Brukardt, Holland, Percy, & Zimpher, N., 2004; Kecskes and Foster, 2013; Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2008; Sturm, Eatman, Saltmarsh, & Bush, 2011). In the first case, very few doctoral dissertations are written and credited to more than one author. Indeed, the process leading to the granting of the most advanced educational degree is simply the end of a long number of years of normalization that mirrors the grading system children learn beginning in elementary school. Our kids say, “Look, ‘I’ got an A in math!” This individualistic mentality is so deeply embedded in our culture that some may be wondering why I am even mentioning it. In the second case, the sophisticated community partner with whom I work appreciates the invitation to see the students involved in the community-engaged classroom as “ours.” The students and I get invested in the community project and he and his staff get invested in the learning of the students. Magic happens; but then we forget, habit takes over, and we separate into our corners – service over there, learning over here. Finally, regarding the third example, there is good news: I have witnessed more inquiries and

interest in the concept, examples, and strategies for engaging academic departments in the past 10 months than in the past 10 years.

The questions above, aligning with the goals of this special journal issue, ask us to consider foundational assumptions about our work. While attempting to further dialogue about these and other important issues, the overarching goal of this article is to invite us to envision a path forward to help “un-stall” the community engagement movement and to deepen and broaden our practice and impact with communities, students, campus faculty and staff. I will argue that to accomplish this, we should consider taking cues from cutting-edge thinking emerging out of the public, private, and nonprofit sectors – all suggesting the need to collectivize our work, in one way or another. One great place to focus this effort is on the backbone of higher education: academic disciplines and their campus expressions, academic departments (Battistoni et al., 2003; Kecskes, 2013; Zlotkowski, 2000). We will end with a composite vision, compiled from data and experiences collected at several colleges and universities in the United States and beyond, for a partnership landscape that positions the academic unit closer to the center of the community engagement enterprise. First, we start with reciprocity.

### **Taking Cues – These Times Are a Changin’**

Over the years, various community partners have introduced me to key readings that are now established parts of my syllabi – reciprocity in action. This was the case a few years ago when I invited an innovative deputy city manager to speak in our graduate strategic planning seminar. To prepare for dialogue she asked that the students – all current or future public sector managers or nonprofit leaders – read “Collective Impact” (Kania & Kramer, 2011). The authors of the article lay bare the long-term tendency in the social sector to focus on *isolated impact*:

An approach oriented toward finding and funding a solution embodied within a single organization, combined with the hope that the most effective organizations will grow or replicate to extend their impact more widely. Funders search for more effective interventions as if there were a cure for failing schools that only needs to be discovered, in the way that medical cures are discovered in laboratories. As a result of this process, nearly 1.4 million nonprofits try to invent independent solutions to major social problems, often working at odds with each other and exponentially increasing the perceived resources required to make meaningful progress. (p. 38)

The authors then use case studies to outline a social change agenda focusing on a specific collective impact methodology.

Reciprocity in action continues. Last spring, I invited Tom Potter, Portland’s former police chief as well as former mayor, to speak to senior undergraduate students in PSU’s civic leadership academic program. He also requested that the students pre-read an article he brought to my attention called “Reinventing Cities” (Carleton, 2014). The author, writing on behalf of the United States Chamber of Commerce Foundation, outlines what she calls an “abundance

mindset." Paralleling Kania & Kramer's (2011) invocation toward collective impact, Carleton suggests that city leaders focus on coordinating and leveraging assets that are currently available to create livable cities. Key take away points from the movement are: create an inclusive vision; share ownership and rewards; develop synergistic terms for partnership; put initiatives into a broader regional context; and urge longer-term horizons.

The social (nonprofit) sector is asking fundamental questions about how to approach the amelioration of the most challenging, or "wicked" (Conklin, 2006; Rittle & Webber, 1973), social challenges. Concomitantly, the private sector is also calling for a foundational reframing of how we view resources, problems and solutions relating to cities. To complete the trifecta, the public sector is also realizing that partnered work is now a 21<sup>st</sup> century mandate for government agencies. In "Contemplating Collaboration," Swindel & Hilvert (2014) write, "collaboration has proven to be an effective tool for jurisdictions to join with others – including other local governments, private sector organizations, and nonprofits – to achieve goals and deliver services that they may not have been able to accomplish on their own" (p. 7). Indeed, in public sector governance theory, Bovaird (2007) suggests that the concept of "coproduction" – occasions when citizens, multiple agencies, and governing entities work together to define and create solutions for social problems – is an integrating mechanism and an incentive for resource mobilization, and should be leveraged more to get work done. Recently emerging "new public governance" models (Morgan & Cook, 2014; Pestov et al., 2012) also embrace a co-constructed approach to public policy development while providing robust theoretical frameworks for collective work. Finally, in the scholarship of global development theory, coproduction is also increasingly cited and utilized, especially in resource-poor countries (Joshi & Moore, 2003; Ostrom, 1996).

In the case of all three sectors outlined above, authors are not suggesting that social actors simply collaborate more or "do more with less." Rather, thought (and increasingly philanthropic) leaders are calling for a fundamental re-framing of how we view social challenges as well as our approaches to addressing them. They are calling for – and enacting – change from the inside-out. Kania & Kramer (2011) outline the five conditions of collective success: (a) a common agenda – "Collective impact requires all participants to have a shared vision for change, one that includes a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it through agreed upon actions" (p. 39); (b) shared measurement systems; (c) mutually reinforcing activities; (d) continuous communication; and, (f) backbone support organizations. Further, in an earlier collaboration with Harvard scholar Ronald Heifetz (2004), the authors distinguish between "technical" and "adaptive" problems, suggesting that a common impact approach is not likely needed when problems and solutions are well defined and organizations exist that have the ability to implement the (technical) solution, e.g., building a bridge. By contrast, adaptive problems are much more complex and the answer is not known. "In these cases, reaching an effective solution requires learning by the stakeholders involved in the problem, who must then change their own behavior in order to create a solution" (Kania & Kramer, 2011, p. 39). Examples of adaptive problems might include reducing racism, improving public education, or addressing global warming. Apropos to our topic, it might be establishing

long-term strategies for members of academic departments to work together internally as well as externally with key community partners and students to define and develop big, collective program-level social impact actions and goals directly related to the public purposes of the discipline.

### ***Engagement 2.0: Challenges and Opportunities for Engaging Departments***

Over the past 30 years, the community engagement movement has made enormous progress – but almost exclusively at the top and bottom of the organizational landscape. Zlotkowski & Saltmarsh (2006) summarize it succinctly, in the context of the academic unit:

The task of creating engaged departments is both one of the most important and one of the most challenging facing the service-learning movement. Like other academic initiatives before it, the future of service-learning will depend to a large extent on its ability to access and to win over the power at the heart of contemporary higher education: the academic department.

We have, of course, always known that this day would come. While presidents have lined up to sign Campus Compact's Declaration on the Civic Responsibility of Higher Education, the percentage of faculty using community-based work in their teaching continues to increase, and more and more institutions are moving to establish some kind of office to facilitate campus-community collaborations, one overriding question remains: will individual faculty interest seeping up from below and administrative encouragement trickling down from above finally reach each other at the level of departmental culture or will they instead encounter an impermeable membrane? (p. 278)

Indeed, despite an impressive and undeniable boom in rhetorical and resource commitment for community engagement at the institutional level (e.g., more campus service centers, an increase in senior level administrative appointments to inspire and track engagement, and so forth) as well as an exponential growth in the number of faculty effectively using community-engaged pedagogies, I contend that the "heart of contemporary higher education: the academic department," lags considerably behind. Why? What might be done to address this lacuna and, along the way, help to un-stall the movement?

With few exceptions, as a country we venerate individuals and individualistic efforts. In higher education, this is most certainly the case. Many faculty say, "my courses," "my scholarly agenda," "my students," even "my community partner(s)," and so on. Using cultural theory (Douglas, 1970) as a critical lens we know that higher education institutions tend to use egalitarian language when addressing external audience, especially public and nonprofit community partners, while hierarchical and/or individualistic worldviews tend to dominate during partnership implementation (Kecskes, 2006). Despite our best intentions and enormous efforts, these individualistic tendencies set higher education institutions apart from the communities that comprise them. In fact, national organizations and campus-based

“community service centers” unwittingly support these tendencies, especially faculty-driven individualized, or “isolated impact.” For example, at the national level we annually recognize one faculty member for long-term and often herculean commitment to community change via Campus Compact’s annually coveted Thomas Ehrlich Civically Engaged Faculty Award. And for years, colleges have replicated this strategy at the campus level with a variety of often-creative award or recognition ceremonies. These activities represent a higher education expression of important but *isolated* impact, focused largely on the work of individual “rock star” faculty. According to the collective impact framework, no amount of isolated faculty work will add up to more than the sum of its parts. Working smarter, longer or harder will not address the adaptive challenge of un-stalling, or accelerating, the community engagement movement. Significantly increasing the funding available – without shifting the focus, or modifying the vision of success from one to many – may marginally increase impact, but not lead to the “radical institutional change” called for a decade ago in the Wingspread statement calling into question the role of higher education (Brukardt et al., 2004, p. iii). Indeed, to move higher education community engagement to level 2.0, we must find ways to collectivize our efforts; one particularly challenging yet promising practice is to move deeper toward the heart of higher education, by engaging one idiosyncratic academic department at a time.

### **Unpacking Edwards (1999) – Disconnect and New Seeing**

Why, as Edwards contends, has there been a noticeable lack of discussion of – or even new ideas about – departments’ role in reform? From the campus view, many academic departments seem to exist in terrain akin to the old idea of the “Wild West.” A huge area – an unregulated land – spanning an enormous distance between senior level administrator’s attempts to influence the direction of their institutions, and an individual faculty member’s professional efforts, often inspired by a drive to make the world a better place, in line with an individualistic vision of “better.”

There are structural challenges; most notably, faculty members are trained to take cues about their research agenda, new pedagogies, etc., horizontally from their national disciplinary organizations; yet, they are professionally embedded in a campus which is (in general) a vertical, hierarchical organization. Departmental faculty, trained in the rigors and mores of their discipline, may politely (or not so politely) listen to senior administrator’s views about the university, but are not mandated to heed them. Why? Not because they don’t care about their institution or their community – indeed, most do – but because they may care more, indeed deeply about the substance of their discipline and/or about their careers. From a professional perspective, ambitious faculty who wish to quickly advance their career often feel compelled to move out of their institution while remaining within their discipline. Career advancement in these cases manifests as movement within the discipline from their current institution to another ostensibly more prestigious one, i.e., advancing one (or more) rung(s) up the ladder. Situations certainly vary; however, this often occurs in the form of a shift from one public institution to another public or private institution that has the external perception of being

more prestigious; or from a Tier II college to Tier I; or from a department with lower national “rankings” to one that is considered to have an elevated reputation, and so on.

There are, however, promising trends to help support more discipline-based, departmental or collective program-focused efforts to counter this apparent disconnect between faculty’s desire to engage with community and to professionally advance. In 2001, during his presidential address at the National Communication Association, James Applegate helped re-brand the national organization by claiming communication to be an engaged discipline.

Our work together to create an engaged communication discipline is part of a larger transformation of higher education. Engaged campuses and engaged disciplines, meeting the long and short term needs of society through research and teaching, are part of the new mandate for higher education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.... As a discipline, communication must not accommodate to higher education as it is but be a change agent, helping higher education become what it should be to play its proper role in a 21<sup>st</sup> century global society. (p. 6)

Morealle and Applegate (2006) elucidate the inner workings, processes, and rationale for creating an engaged discipline; since that time, other disciplines have followed in their wake. They remind us “the philosopher Marcel Proust observed that the real act of discovery lies not in discovering new lands but in seeing with new eyes” (p. 264). Before we begin to look at the academic department with new eyes, however, it is important to acknowledge that without creating a sense of urgency, significant change is likely to remain elusive. Kotter (1996, 2008), an internationally respected scholar on organizational leadership and change, recommends that leaders who wish to create change must first and foremost establish a “sense of urgency” for change organization-wide. Surely, many campuses sense urgency – crisis even – for action. But the focus of attention in recent years has been much more on shrinking state support, fiscal meltdown, the advent of on-line learning, and so on. This sense of urgency has not translated to the academic department in ways that we have been discussing thus far. Perhaps recognizing an internal undercurrent of fragmentation, isolation and alienation in the faculty may inspire change at the departmental level.

Boyte (2004), in his study of University of Minnesota faculty, discovered a yearning by faculty to connect more deeply to the public purposes of their discipline. Boyte argues that there is faculty interest in building meaning and connecting the core academic work of the unit to the public work of communities:

Far more than we expected, the interviews surfaced a strong and often painful sense of loss of public purposes in individual jobs, professions and disciplines, and the whole institution.... Faculty voiced desire for public engagement to be constitutive of professional work. Interest in the public relevance of teaching and research was not simply an individual desire but was also framed in disciplinary terms. ‘Our whole department feels too cloistered.’ (Boyte, 2004, p. 4)

Further, while students often feel quite respectful and appreciative of individual faculty and their efforts, they may sense isolation at the departmental level. Students sometimes experience this as a fragmented curriculum, especially where community engaged project work is concerned. As most parents would attest, young people learn a lot more by what they see (modeling) than what they hear (lecturing). Students know that, in general, faculty don't work together very often on department-level initiatives – especially those connected to long-term community-based projects – and when we do, we often do not do so in exemplary ways. Most faculty are keenly aware of the hyper-networked nature of the globalized world in front of us; therefore, we smartly teach our students about the importance of collaboration, consensus building, appreciation for diversity, and so forth. However, what students often see (how faculty interact with each other, organize the program-level curriculum in fragmented ways, etc.) belies these important messages they receive from us.

From an institutional theory perspective (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Scott, 1987; Selznick, 1948, 1992) our actions contradict our values. Taking a sociological view of organizations (Perrow, 1986), which includes an analysis of the whole “that gives them meaning” (p. 158), this disconnect between what members of academic departments publicly say about themselves, and their observed behavior in the world, weakens them. Thus, the aggregated collective impact of departments remains limited – on students and communities as a whole, and on members of the academic unit themselves. Here, standing in the middle of the academic department, I contend that the community engagement movement is stalled.

Nearly a decade ago, Zlotkowski & Saltmarsh (2006), and others, saw this day coming.

Whether one focuses on the integrity, the sustainability, or the impact of academy-community partnerships, it is difficult to see how the national service-learning movement can realize its potential—or even reach the next logical step in its development—without the leadership of the engaged department. (p. 287)

To jumpstart a new stage of development, the time has arrived for higher education community engagement scholars and practitioners to re-focus attention on the challenges, promising mechanisms, and visions for creating engaged departments. So, when we see with Proust's “new eyes,” what begins to come into focus? What are some key questions, strategies, and inspirations to help envision new spaces for creating engaged academic units?

But first, a brief discussion about who's in, who's out, and who gets a pass. In other words, do we really have to deal with this (too!) on top of all of the other pressures bearing down on our department? The quick answer is yes, but only if we – as a collective – are willing to burrow more deeply down into the undeniable foundation of higher education to take a long look at who we are and how we carry out our craft. Well-meaning critics sometimes remind us that some institutions have actually dismantled the departmental structure. Excellent. I wonder, however, the extent to which members of those institutions have dismantled the more subtle forms of individualism and a traditional approach to isolated effort. Others suggest that while an engaged department agenda may be appropriate for urban institutions, it is less important

for rural colleges and universities. Indeed, I would argue that the opposite is more likely to be true: In rural areas where community partners are often less plentiful, it is even more important to think collectively about our action. Many are rightly concerned about where the growing number of adjunct instructors “fit” into an engaged department agenda. More toward the center is my response: Why? Many adjunct instructors wear multiple hats; indeed, in many instances adjunct instructors have considerable community-based experience, run nonprofits, are mid- or upper-level government agency or private sector leaders, etc. Further, in public institutions in particular, adjunct instructors tend to teach the lower-level, large introductory courses. Students’ very first courses in college are an excellent and strategic time to begin discussing and norming the important, community-oriented relationship of the academic discipline to one or more of its public purposes. Finally, some critics have suggested that Carnegie-classified Research One universities are best situated to embrace an engaged department agenda. While that cohort of institutions plays an undeniably important traditional role to signal and support change in higher education, I respectfully contend that those critics may have lost the main point. At the foundational level, an engaged department agenda invites academic units to deeply consider who they are, what they do, how they do it, how they act (individually and collectively); and, germane to this discussion, how and why they interact with the community that comprises them. Further, an engaged department agenda invites faculty to envision intentional, *collective* action focused more squarely and publicly on the public purposes of the discipline.

## **Touching the Heart of Higher Education: Steps toward Engaging Departments**

Transforming oneself and/or one’s collective unit is a complex, complicated task requiring time, patience, generosity and an inclination toward reflective practice and creativity, ideally guided by a facilitative leader. There are significant challenges along the way; most notably, identity challenges. The engaged department agenda invites academic units to re-envision themselves with a more public and publically focused, intentionally collective, and accountable ethos. While not all members of the unit need to participate equally, the departmental faculty will ideally embrace the spirit of the effort, not unlike how a department currently supports the development of new curricular programs. Often faculty members wonder where to start. The path is rarely linear. The general recommendation is to start where the unit is currently. Listen to each other, revisit deep values and consider big, collective work for the unit that can be well supported (first and foremost by excited and engaged students in the major) and sustained over time with stalwart community partners. There simply is not “one right way” to proceed. Caveats notwithstanding, professional community-engaged work with scores of academic departments over the past 15 years suggest that regardless of the order in which they are approached, many successful units traverse most of the following five key stages of collective work.

### **Who Are We? Dialogue Stage**

As a starting point, the following two questions may help re-focus department-level dialogue away from the important but sometimes distracting instrumental functions of the unit (e.g., budget issues), toward its more constitutive elements: (a) What is the public purpose of the discipline? And, (b) what makes the academic department distinctive? A challenge, of course, is that there may be considerable deviation in unit members' idea of the department's ethos, mission and values. Surprising overlaps in interest and philosophy may also surface. Starting smaller and building on common ground are excellent strategies.

### **Assessment: Taking Stock Stage**

Taking stock of individual faculty members' current community-engaged activities can be quite useful. Instrumentally, documenting faculty work is quite helpful. Constitutively, actively listening to colleagues' efforts and envisioning how to connect those efforts with others' can be inspirational. When the group as a whole has a more comprehensive sense of the range, motivations, history and impact of members' community-engaged work – including service-learning, community-based research, service, and other community-connected activities – synergies tend to naturally appear. It is sometimes at this stage of development that some faculty members realize that despite the fact that they do not prefer to use service-learning methodology, they are quite able to play important roles in an engaged department agenda.

### **Connect and Envision Stage**

Soon after or concomitantly during the earlier stages, a few faculty members often naturally discover new connections among themselves and within the community. Generally, this is a creative and energetic phase in the development toward defining a collective commitment. Envisioning the curricular, research and service potential of focusing an increased percentage of departmental energy into one or a focused set of public issue(s) and associated community partner(s) often begets excitement and concern in equal measure: Excitement due to the possibilities and concern over the impression of loss of control, including loss of academic freedom. Addressing the sense of "loss" is beyond the scope of this work. However, for now, remember that embedded within a more focused agenda are multiple entry points, each inviting and leveraging diverse areas of expertise. In the final section of this paper, we present composite visions generated from data gathered from myriad academic departments over the past decade.

### **The Hard Work Stage: Create a Support Network and Keep Track**

The common impact methodology (Kania & Kramer, 2011) suggests the need for agreement about a common vision and collectively developed assessment targets. There are no short cuts. This step requires hard work, compromise and patience. In the context of reciprocity, no one individual is more "expert" than another; indeed, members of the group are in it together. Kania & Kramer (2011) also recognize the need for a "backbone organization." This is a set of individuals or an organization that takes responsibility for creating new spaces for dialogue, collaboration and collective public work. One promising idea is that extant community-campus engagement support centers could transform into enacting this backbone organizational role.

### Celebrate and Disseminate Stage

Supporting the development of engaged departments requires ongoing effort. For a discussion of differentiated activities from multiple levels of campus and community leaders (including specific roles and strategies for senior administrators, department chairs, faculty, CSDs/community engagement office staff, community partners, and students) see Kecskes & Spring (2006). Key among supportive activities, however, is celebration and dissemination. Celebration can be informal and regular and/or formal and annual, among several other strategies. If the big goal is to “un-stall” the higher education community engagement movement, then dissemination of efforts – locally and globally – is critically important. This communication activity can and should take various forms ranging from a transparent web presence to scholarly publications and presentations, among many other options.

### Envisioning Big Ideas

All members of the academic department need not participate in equal and similar ways, however, key to the common impact framework as well as to creating engaged departments is a central focus on an interesting, complex and important adaptive problem (Heifitz et al., 2004) that requires consistent attention over an extended event horizon via collaborative, coordinated effort. In other words, big important opportunities associated with big ideas.

Imagine a geology department with a historical penchant for blaming K-12 teachers for the consistently underprepared nature of its incoming undergraduate students. Further, imagine that after investigation with the local K-12 school system it became apparent to departmental faculty that the “problem” was neither with the students nor with the commitment from the public school teachers, rather, from a rapidly changing demographic and chronic deficiency of resources. This was precisely the case in Orange County, California. The collective response from geology faculty at Orange Coast College was to strategically overhaul their undergraduate curriculum so as to annually connect hundreds of its geology majors to various K-12 schoolrooms throughout the district via service-learning. Over time, it became apparent to the faculty that the rapidly changing demographics of the local area required more direct connections to local families, especially to new immigrant *Latino* families. Therefore, in collaboration with several elementary schools in the lower income area of Costa Mesa, service-learning students and faculty at Orange Coast College developed “Family Science Nights” as a way for the institution to go out into the schools. By 2006, they had presented more than 30 family science nights (five each semester) touching hundreds of families. Further inspired by interests from the families, increased educational opportunities for their students, and support from the local schools, the departmental team developed “Community Science Nights” as a way to bring families into the college. These events involve hundreds of undergraduate students, 25-30 college faculty and touch more than 3,000 attendees (Yett, 2006).

This and 10 other exemplar case studies are featured in *Engaging departments: Moving faculty culture from private to public, individual to collective focus for the common good* (Kecskes,

2006). The higher education community engagement movement would benefit greatly from additional scholarly documentation and dissemination of departmental common impact engagement efforts. Academic units wishing to more rigorously discuss, measure and track departmental engagement efforts over time may find a theoretical discussion of engaged department in the context of academic reform helpful (Kecskes, 2013) or download the nationally validated *Creating Community-Engaged Departments Rubric* (2009) available here: [http://www.pdx.edu/sites/www.pdx.edu.cae/files/media\\_assets/Engaged%20Department%20RUBRIC%20-%20Kecskes%202009-paginated.pdf](http://www.pdx.edu/sites/www.pdx.edu.cae/files/media_assets/Engaged%20Department%20RUBRIC%20-%20Kecskes%202009-paginated.pdf)

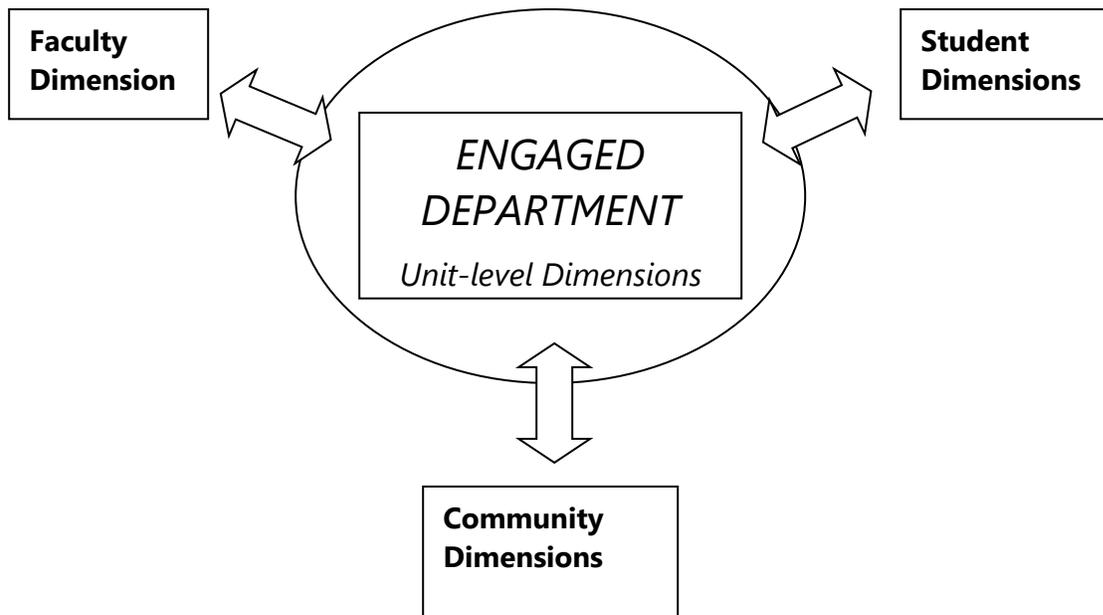
### ***New Questions, New Responses: Visions of Success for Engaged Departments***

Similar to many community engagement practitioners, I have attended hundreds of presentations about impactful and important service-learning efforts. Over the last few years, however, once the presentations have ended, *new* questions have emerged. I now wonder, and sometimes ask:

1. To what extent have you connected other faculty, especially those in your department, to your important work?
2. What might it look like if your exemplary service-learning efforts added a community-based research component stewarded by one or more of your departmental colleagues?
3. What might happen if you and your departmental colleagues collectively decided to work with key community partners to develop and implement a coordinated and more comprehensive effort to address the complex, adaptive problem you have begun to explore?

In professional workshop settings, we use the following heuristic to frame and invite responses to queries about potential new roles and outcomes, focused on four dimensions, or areas of activity, associated with faculty, students, communities, and the unit.

## CONNECTIVE PATHWAYS FOR DEPARTMENTAL ENGAGEMENT



*Adapted from source:* Kecskes, K. (2006). "Department-wide engagement: Creating and supporting durable structures for campus and community change." In Jones, S.G. & Perry, J.L. (Ed.) *Quick hits for educating citizens* (p. 82-84). Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

When provided formal opportunities, faculty, staff, students, community partners and senior administrators respond creatively to invitations to envision new ideas, activities, roles, and outcomes for key stakeholders associated with an engaged department enterprise. What follows are synthesized responses, collected over the past decade from those stakeholders, located in more than a dozen countries, and focused on the four key dimensions for departmental engagement.

### Student Dimension

- Better understanding of the public purposes of the discipline and how it relates to courses and careers.
- More enthusiasm, investment and engagement; less resistance.
- Development of a student advisory council; students sit on faculty hiring, promotion and tenure, and other decision-making committees.
- Pathway of courses developed with defined community engagement theme throughout entire curricular program in the major.
- Students work developmentally with one community partner organization throughout curriculum.

- Pathway of community-engaged courses clearly visible, attractive and easily accessible, from the general education curriculum through the major.
- Faculty, student, administrative, community partner teams work together on developmental reflection and integration activities.
- Increased understanding of career pathways due to significant and repeated community experiences.
- See and feel more cohesion both in the curriculum and in the department.
- Formal designation of “civically engaged scholars” on transcript.
- Students bring projects to departmental faculty; develop discipline-specific student leadership clubs.
- Graduates seek out or create “engaged employment” opportunities.

### Faculty Dimension

- Faculty colleagues will have deeper understanding of the rationale for and commitment to community-engaged work.
- Senior faculty set example of successful engagement projects for new hires (junior faculty).
- Recognition that faculty members do not need to use service-learning pedagogies to be key members of an engaged department.
- Community-engaged projects diversify since students and community partners are more empowered.
- Faculty in the unit will have community partners they can “count on” annually.

### Unit Dimension

- Good articulation of community engagement will increase interest from civically-engaged students.
- Collective research agenda developed with consistent community partners.
- Teaching loads are adjusted in accord with service-learning and other community-engaged professional commitments.
- During each faculty meeting, a faculty/community partner “spotlight” takes place thus providing additional venues to share and learn together.
- Community engagement is formally recognized and rewarded.
- Community partners have substantive opportunities to present discipline-specific engagement ideas at regular departmental faculty meetings.
- Community partner-faculty retreats at beginning and end of academic year.
- Develop meaningful and relevant program-level assessments collaboratively.
- Increase pride in department.
- Resources available for professional development and presentations.
- Maintaining transparent inventory of community engagement activities to help build synergies.

- Traditional and community-engaged research methods are equally valued (formally).
- Alumni are better integrated into departmental affairs, especially with student placements, fund raising, dissemination efforts, etc.
- Departmental website features collective community commitments, opportunities and priorities.
- Community engagement rhetoric and action align.
- Department is held to a higher standard.

## Community Dimension

- Increased understanding of faculty roles, possibilities and constraints.
- Community partners play increasingly important leadership roles in the college or university.
- Community partners teach/co-teach/mentor/guest lecture more.
- Community partners are increasingly aware that they are helping train the next generation of community leaders, and potentially new staff.
- Build professional networks, mutual respect.
- Community partners recognize that partnership work has increased and provides critical value to departmental faculty and students in the major.
- Community partners assist in the development of program-wide and course learning outcomes to increase relevancy.
- Community partners feel more welcome, comfortable, confident.
- Community partners experience longer-term commitment to partnered projects.
- Development of the “why engage with community” statement for website together.
- The following are collaboratively discussed and developed: project goals, differentiated roles, assessment strategies, output/data management, grants and collective research agenda.
- Community partners move from a passive to active role in departmental affairs.

## Conclusion

This article invites us to consider what happens when the two major forces in higher education outlined by Zlotkowski and Saltmarsh (2006) – “faculty interest (in community engagement) seeping up from below and administrative encouragement trickling down from above” (p. 278) – reach each other at the level of departmental culture and there *is* a permeable membrane. In a word: change. Senior scholar R. Eugene Rice (2006) argues that at the heart of this work is:

an epistemological challenge to the disconnection of the university from the larger purposes and deepest needs of local communities, regions, state and nations. The walls of the university and college are becoming more permeable; the old knowledge boundaries no longer apply; reaching out can no longer be seen as a service, but as a

necessity. Engaging departments takes us into new territory—new ways of knowing, learning, and relating. (p. xv)

Since the concept of the engaged department emerged into the community engagement lexicon 15 years ago, key conceptual and practical advances have been made. Yet, while hundreds of academic units have made attempts to increase community collaboration and focus at the departmental level, this phase of the movement has merely chugged along. In this article, I argue that the times have indeed changed; a new moment of opportunity has emerged to “un-stall” higher education’s desire for increased social relevancy. Several social forces from the public, private and nonprofit sectors are currently converging with a more singular recommendation: work together! The technical problems of the 20<sup>th</sup> century are now transformed into the “super wicked” problems (Levin et al., 2009) of the current era. While, as a movement, we can and should feel proud of our significant accomplishments over the past 30 years, the pace of change today no longer allows us to continue to focus largely on individual efforts. In solidarity with our colleagues, in every sector and on a global scale, higher education needs shock therapy. The collective impact framework points toward a path forward; it “presages the spread of a new approach that will enable us to solve today’s most serious social problems with the resources we already have at our disposal. It would be a shock to the system. But it’s a form of shock therapy that’s badly needed” (p. 41).

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