

Engagement Operations Council

Forward:

The UAF Chancellor has asked the UAF Cooperative Extension Service to establish and facilitate an Engagement Operations Council. Background information on engagement is provided as an introduction to the proposed design of such a council.

Cooperative Extension Service

The Extension Committee on Organization and Policy (ECOP) of the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges responded to the Kellogg Commission's call for engagement within land-grant universities by creating the Extension Vision for the 21st Century Committee. The committee produced two documents in which they described their vision of how extension needed to change so it could become an instrument for creating engagement. "If Extension is to thrive" they wrote, "it must understand and adjust to rapid changes and emerging challenges." They added:

- "This report emphasizes that Extension must become more flexible and adaptable if it is to be a fully effective partner within the university and within communities that it serves."
- "Extension must become the catalyst for connecting people to the wealth of relevant knowledge and research residing within various colleges and disciplines of the university."
- "(T)he communities that Extension serves may be so narrowly defined as to preclude Extension from becoming a credible partner in university-wide engagement."
- "Over the past four decades, Extension has failed to fully integrate new issues and constituencies into its agenda and has continued to focus largely on rural and agricultural issues."
- "The time is right for Extension to partner with many of the other land-grant university outreach efforts to accelerate significantly and enhance the university's overall engagement strategy."
- "If Extension is to play a significant role in engagement, it must change its organizational, staffing and funding capacities."
- "Extension leadership faces the formidable task of bringing about the change necessary to increase organizational capacity to deal quickly and effectively with emerging issues and challenges."

UAF Cooperative Extension Service

The UAF Cooperative Extension Service is poised for change in response to a recent recommendation of a USDA/CREES review team for greater integration of the program into the UAF system in all aspects of engagement and outreach. The team also encouraged creation of a UA system-wide engagement in the spirit of the Kellogg Commission report, "The Engaged

Institution,” with CES support. The team concluded the following regarding Extension involvement:

The potential for the Land-Grant in Alaska is great. The challenges are many. Land-Grant universities across the country are in various stages of redesigning their teaching, research, and outreach/extension to be more productively involved with their communities. This is a fundamental responsibility to the people, both local and global, to address actual, relevant needs, bringing tangible benefits to the people, to business, and to government. ... Strong visionary leadership will make a difference, Change and communication must occur on many levels in the university. Participation and inclusion in the processes of change must be welcomed.

Engagement Plan of Action

1. Create an engagement position within CES with responsibility to work with the EOC
2. Organize the first meeting of the EOC that includes a dialogue and deliberations activity to develop a shared understanding and definition of engagement
3. Work with the EOC to develop an engagement plan building on existing programs
4. Develop an engagement training and educational program
5. Work with researchers and faculty to identify engagement opportunities
6. Work with the Alaska Municipal League to identify community needs and begin development of an engagement network across the state
7. Develop a list of potential organizational partners across the state

To this purpose, we invite you to participate in the Engagement Operations Council under the proposed framework that follows.

ENGAGEMENT OPERATIONS COUNCIL

Purpose

The purpose of the Engagement and Operations Council (EOC) is to promote, facilitate, and support relationships of mutual benefit among the faculty and staff of the University of Alaska Fairbanks, individual Alaskans of all ages, and their communities. These relationships of engagement go well beyond most conceptions of outreach and public service by creating new public/university partnerships defined by mutual respect for what each partner brings to the table. The goal is to create new opportunities for the university to become more productively involved with the communities it was created to serve.

Functions

The Engagement Operations Council will:

- facilitate faculty and staff dialogues focused on developing a shared understanding of engagement
- facilitate the creation of policies and plans for implementing a UAF Engagement Program
- identify learning needs specific to the understanding and practice of engagement
- develop education and training opportunities in support of engagement learning needs
- coordinate and/or facilitate the engagement and outreach activities of UAF

Composition

The EOC will be composed of representatives from all UAF research, teaching, and public service organizational units. Leadership and staff support will be provided by the UAF Cooperative Extension Service.

Concept

Engagement is a concept of current focus developed from the work of the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities conducted from 1995 through 2001. The commission, also called the Presidents Commission because its memberships consisted of 30 current and former University presidents, produced six reports. They offered the following definition of engagement:

Engagement goes well beyond extension, conventional outreach, and even most conceptions of public service. Inherent concepts emphasize a one-way process in which the university transfers its expertise to key constituents. Embedded in the engagement ideal is a commitment of sharing and reciprocity. By engagement, the Commission envisions partnerships, two-way streets defined by mutual respect among the partners for what each brings to the table.

They also developed a seven-part test to define an engaged institution:

1. Responsiveness
2. Respect for partners

3. Academic neutrality
4. Accessibility
5. Integration
6. Coordination
7. Resource Partnerships

In a five-year review of the impact the Commission's work has had on public higher education, former commission Executive Director Dr. John V. Byrne concluded, "It is in the area of engagement that the Commission has had its greatest impact." He noted that:

- "Engagement is now recognized in the mission statements of a number of universities"
- "The administrative structures of several universities have been modified to create leadership positions for engagement at the Vice President and Vice Provost level."
- "Several universities have created relatively high level offices to administer engagement activities."
- "Several universities have created plans for engagement or have included engagement as part of their university strategic or academic plan."

He also observed, "However, some universities have adopted the term 'engagement' but have not implemented the Kellogg Commission's definition of engagement with respect to the aspect of 'mutual sharing.' Several universities use the term 'engagement' interchangeable with term 'outreach'."

Engagement at the University of Alaska Fairbanks

The University of Alaska Fairbanks has its origins as a land-grant institution in the fashion of those that began with the Morrill Act of 1862. The U.S. Government granted lands to states to establish institutions of higher education specifically to teach agriculture and mechanical arts at a time when agriculture involved a much larger percentage of the general population. UAF began as the College of Agriculture and Mining. The institution has become a recognized leader in arctic research, academic instruction and public service. Engagement and outreach are at the core of the public service mission of UAF.

UAF has a proud history of engagement with the people of Alaska through its Cooperative Extension Service, Marine Advisory Program, Alaska Center for Climate Assessment and Policy, and Scenarios Network for Alaska Planning. The EOC will provide new resources and institutional commitment to build on, and share, that expertise with the faculty and staff at UAF as well as the people of Alaska. It will also have the capacity to draw from the experiences of the many universities that have been working on the definition and implementation of engagement for the past seven years.