

Carnegie's New Community Engagement Classification: Affirming Higher Education's Role in Community

Amy Driscoll

In 2005, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (CFAT) stirred the higher education world with the announcement of a new classification for institutions that engage with community. The classification, community engagement, is the first in a set of planned classification schemes resulting from the foundation's reexamination of the traditional Carnegie classification system. The new classifications are intended to provide flexibility, closer match of data with purpose, and a multidimensional approach for better representing institutional identity. The first of those new schemes, community engagement, has prompted a flurry of inquiry, self-assessment, documentation, and development of engagement practices as educators in colleges and universities strive to qualify for the classification.

Introduction to the Classification

The community engagement classification affirms that a university or college has institutionalized engagement with community in its identity, culture, and commitments. The classification further affirms that the practices of community engagement have been developed to the extent that they are aligned with the institutional identity and an integral component of the institutional culture. This classification is elective: it relies on voluntary participation by an institution. In contrast to the traditional Carnegie classification, which uses national data, the community engagement classification uses documentation provided by each institution.

The term *community engagement* was intentionally selected for the classification to encompass the broadest conception of interactions between higher education and community and to promote inclusivity. The definition of *community engagement* used for the classification also represents broad thinking about collaborations between higher education and the community and intentionally encourages important qualities such as mutuality and reciprocity. The definition serves as an initial guide to both documentation and review processes for the classification: *community engagement* describes the collaboration “between higher education institutions and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity.”

Development and Initiation of the Community Engagement Classification

For many higher education professionals and community partners, the classification represented a unique opportunity to affirm the labors of many institutions and their partners to attend to Ernest Boyer’s (1990, 1996) urging to embrace their responsibilities to society. Thus, its development was approached with the utmost reflection in terms of both intentions and content.

Intentions of the Classification. The vision for the classification was developed collaboratively by Carnegie colleagues and national engagement leaders and served as a significant guide for developing the documentation framework that institutions would use to apply for the classification. From its inception, the documentation framework was designed to respect the diversity of institutions and their approaches to community engagement; engage institutions in a process of inquiry, reflection, and self-assessment; and honor institutions’ achievements while promoting the ongoing development of their programs (Driscoll, 2008). In addition, the development priorities attended to practicality and usefulness of data so that institutional documentations would be appropriate for such multiple purposes as program improvement and accreditation.

Development Processes for the Classification. From the beginning, the processes for developing a documentation framework for the community engagement classification built on concurrent developments for support. The ongoing benchmarking and assessment approaches of Campus Compact, the Council of Independent Colleges, the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, the Community-Campus Partnerships for Health, and individual institutions contributed substantive direction and examples. At the same time as those approaches were reviewed, intense consultation with national leaders highlighted challenges, potential, and priorities for the new classification and its documentation.

The earliest draft of the community engagement documentation framework integrated insights from the current literature base with those sources

of consultation and current efforts. From there, Carnegie sponsored a pilot study of documentation with representatives of thirteen institutions of higher education. The representatives initially met to review and revise the documentation draft before engaging in a six-month trial of reporting and documenting community engagement at their respective institutions. After using the documentation framework, the group came together a second time to describe their individual campus experiences and synthesize recommendations for further revision of the framework. Each institution experienced new challenges and questions, as did the revision process for the documentation.

In the final revision process, there was unanimous support for some components of the documentation framework to serve as indicators of community engagement regardless of the diversity of institutions: institutional mission specifying community engagement as a priority, executive leadership that specifically promoted engagement, coordinating infrastructures and budgetary support for community engagement, and faculty development support for those engaged with community. There was also dissent among the pilot institutions about some indicators: search and recruitment policies and practices that support hiring of faculty with expertise and commitment to community engagement, and promotion and tenure policies that reward the scholarship of engagement. A number of representatives in the pilot study supported those indicators for the classification but simultaneously acknowledged that their own campuses could not qualify with such a requirement.

The resulting documentation framework was comprehensive, designed to capture the scope of institutional engagement, inclusive to affirm the diversity of approaches, and rigorous in promoting quality practices of community engagement. The framework would require many campuses to develop new data sources; however, it did encourage use of existing data for practicality reasons.

The Community Engagement Classification Framework

The documentation framework for the new classification was designed with two major components. In the first component, colleges and universities are expected to demonstrate institutionalization of community engagement, demonstrated through indicators of institutional identity and culture and institutional commitment. In the second component, they identify the focus of their community engagement: curricular engagement, outreach and partnerships, or both. This second component requires data, description, and examples of either or both of the focuses.

The documentation process is intensive and requires the collaboration of many institutional and community participants. It has often promoted new communication and cooperation across campuses and with community for data sharing and documentation.

Institutions that are able to document either or both of the categories of community engagement after demonstrating the foundational indicators are clearly deeply engaged with community.

Inaugural Applications—Process and Findings

The inaugural application of community engagement was approached with some trepidation and concern for the untried nature of the classification process, so the application pool was limited to ensure a thorough and reflective review process. A national advisory panel of engagement leaders representing varied institutions and national organizations was selected to support and enhance the review process. The panel also studied the initial applications and review process to inform revision of the classification process and documentation framework.

Profile of Inaugural Institutions Classified as Community Engaged.

The initial response to the first application process came from 145 institutions early in 2006. Of those, 107 were selected to apply based on diversity of institutional size, institutional type, program emphasis, and location. By September 2006, eighty-nine institutions submitted full documentation for review. Those that did not submit applications described a lack of readiness for documentation or a need for further development of their engagement practices. When the newly classified institutions were announced in December 2006, seventy-six colleges and universities, representing a broad range of institutional type and size, were classified as institutions of community engagement.

As hoped and expected, the seventy-six institutions documented widely varied approaches to community engagement. Strong documentations exhibited clear alignment between the foundational indicators, such as mission, leadership, budgetary support, and strategic plan. They described supportive infrastructures in different forms, faculty development in a wide range of strategies, and diverse and creative ways of involving the community in the institution, all of which were compelling evidence of institutional commitment. Another distinction that was noted across the newly classified institutions was a difference in the conceptualization of both community and community engagement. Indiana University-Purdue University, Indianapolis is committed to the concept of civic engagement and documented its commitments and activity according to its philosophical stance. North Carolina State University introduced its documentation with a definition of community unlike Carnegie's geographical concept to better reflect the scope of campus activities. Its definition included "identifiable groups of individuals that share similar interests, concerns, and educational needs around a subject-matter area" (Zuiches and others, 2008, p. 43).

Among the seventy-six classified institutions, five documented only curricular engagement, and nine focused their documentation on outreach

and partnerships. Sixty-two institutions documented both categories of engagement for the classification. Within the documentation of curricular engagement, institutions described different definitions of service-learning, varied integration within campuswide programs, and multiple forms of faculty scholarship related to curricular engagement. Within outreach and partnerships, the institutions described diverse partnerships in terms of disciplinary focus, size, length of time, and purposes and extensive examples of related faculty scholarship.

The decisions of whether to classify individual institutions was a careful process conducted by Carnegie staff and supported by the national advisory panel of leaders in community engagement nationally. It was important during the initiation of the classification process to have multiple perspectives considered in the decision-making process. The panel provided those perspectives on individual applications and at the same time reflected on the documentation framework and the overall application process. Their feedback was a substantive source of revision prior to the 2008 classification application process.

Institutional Perspectives on Impact of Classification. Many of the newly classified institutions achieved instant recognition and visibility when the Carnegie Foundation announced the inaugural group of successfully classified institutions for 2006. For states like Kentucky, in which there was statewide accountability for community engagement, the classification served as a kind of report card. For institutions with the intent of establishing an identity related to community engagement, there was the Carnegie acknowledgment of their focus. Within months after the announcement, institutional brochures and flyers clearly contained this recognition with the university message. A number of institutional representatives reported that the process of documentation revealed both gaps and strengths, often motivating renewed development or internal recognition. The self-assessment or self-study intent of the classification framework prompted many institutions to expand or initiate tracking and assessment systems and strategies.

Reflections on Community Engagement in the Context of the 2006 Classification

A review of the strengths and challenges acknowledged by institutions in their documentation provides clear direction for institutions committed to community engagement. This chapter focuses on the challenges—institutional recording and assessment systems and approaches, revision of promotion and tenure policies and practices, and communication and collaboration with community—because they are applicable to most institutions and have significant potential for improving community engagement in general.

Assessment of Community Engagement. Assessment in general continues to be an ongoing challenge for higher education, so it is not surprising

that assessment of community engagement is in dire need of development. Even the simple tracking and recording of engagement activities appeared to be difficult to maintain with a systematic institution-wide process. Few institutions could be specific about institution-wide student learning outcomes related to engagement, so most assessment of curricular engagement took the form of individual course assessments and occasional program assessment. (Bringle and Hatcher discuss this idea further in Chapter Four.) Most institutions relied on data from individual faculty projects and some departmental reviews to document their community engagement approaches, but few examples of consistent assessment of community engagement were found.

As we expand community engagement across institutions of higher education, it is essential to develop the expertise and resources to assess and evaluate practices. Community engagement requires extensive resources, especially faculty time commitments, so it is imperative to assess well to articulate clarity of direction for these efforts and to ensure that this work is effectively achieving its intentions.

Promotion and Tenure Policies Supporting Community Engagement.

This area of challenge is not a surprise to any professional who has engaged with community, but it was discouraging to find so few examples of revised recognition and reward systems for promotion and tenure. A standard response in the data was that institutions encouraged faculty to include community engagement scholarship in the service category, but that traditional scholarship was the real requirement for promotion and tenure.

All institutions described faculty development support for community engagement, but few documented that the work was a priority in their recruitment and hiring practices. When these gaps—lack of reward and recognition and lack of priority in hiring—are viewed in the context of a strong set of foundational indicators (for example, mission, budget, infrastructure), the inconsistency is disturbing.

Changes in the long-standing tradition of promotion and tenure policies and conceptualizations of scholarship are not easily achieved, as evidenced in the 2006 data. However, if, as the Carnegie classification indicates, community engagement has become an integral component of the role of institutions of higher education, then efforts to make such changes must be accelerated. It has been clearly established in the community engagement literature (Driscoll, 2000; O'Meara and Rice, 2005) that faculty are key to engaged institutions, and therefore supporting them with promotion and tenure policies is long overdue.

Communication and Collaboration with Community. A significant area of challenge appeared first in the foundational indicators and was prominent in the outreach and partnerships section: communication and collaboration with community. Initially institutions struggled to describe how they assessed community perceptions of the institution and how the institution responded to the community. Later in the foundational indicators, institutions were asked to describe the role of community in agenda

setting and decision making regarding community engagement. The differences in the responses to both of these foundational indicators were stark, with some institutions describing wide-ranging strategies and substantive community roles. Other institutions described infrequent or annual small-scale, formal processes with minimal representation of community or limited impact on institutional affairs.

Later in the documentation, when institutions listed and described partnerships with community, they were asked about maintaining reciprocity and systematic feedback in those partnerships. Most institutions could describe only in vague generalities how reciprocity was achieved, and few examples of systematic feedback were found in the data. These levels of involvement with community clearly demand new understandings, new skills, and even a new way of conceptualizing community, and typically with little advance preparation for faculty or administrators. This is another area in which tradition may be blocking progress, as institutions of higher education shed the long-standing ivory tower image and, sometimes, reality.

Conclusion

All of the areas of challenge spotlight the work to be done in higher education if community engagement is to truly be integral to the identity of higher education in the United States. The national recognition of a Carnegie classification has enhanced both the prominence and potential of community engagement in colleges and universities. If that prominence is to be authentic and the potential is to be achieved, higher education must address gaps in assessment and evaluation of community engagement, support for key faculty roles in community engagement with aligned search and hiring practices and promotion and tenure policies, and improved communication and collaboration with community as partners.

At the time of this writing, 154 applications for the 2008 classification were under review. The documentation framework used for the 2008 application process was almost identical to the 2006 framework. There was minimal editing after the initiation and only minimal additions. The 2008 process was, however, completely electronic, and the application process was simpler. A major difference for institutions in 2008 was that the entire documentation framework was available on the Carnegie Web site for a significant period before the application deadlines. The intent of that availability was to support institutions in making a decision about whether to apply. It is surprising that seventy institutions withdrew from the application process just prior to the final deadline, most frequently citing "lack of readiness for qualifying for the classification" as the reason.

It is anticipated that this new round of applications for the Carnegie classification will produce additional insights about the practices of community engagement and will provide significant documentation of progress toward the potential for higher education's role in community.

The application data will undoubtedly contribute substantive direction and additional inquiry to the development agenda for higher education to achieve the promise of community engagement.

References

- Boyer, E. *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*. Princeton, N.J.: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1990.
- Boyer, E. "The Scholarship of Engagement." *Journal of Public Service and Outreach*, 1996, 1(1), 11–20.
- Driscoll, A. "Studying Faculty and Service-Learning: Directions for Inquiry and Development." *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, Fall 2000, 35–41.
- Driscoll, A. "Carnegie's Community Engagement Classification: Intentions and Insights." *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 2008, 40(1), 38–41.
- O'Meara, K. A., and Rice, R. E. *Faculty Priorities Reconsidered: Rewarding Multiple Forms of Scholarship*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005.
- Zuiches, J. J., Cowling, E., Clark, J., Clayton, P., Helm, K., Henry, B., Morris, T., Moore, S., Navey-Davis, S., Schulze, S., Thornton, C., & Warren, A. "Attaining Carnegie's Community-Engagement Classification." *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 2008, 40(1), 42–45.

AMY DRISCOLL is a consulting scholar with the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and coordinator for the community engagement classification.