Summary Report to the Public Engagement Council
October 10, 2012

Introduction

The Graduate Student Community Engaged Scholarship Taskforce, a group of diverse graduate students from across the Minneapolis campus of the University of Minnesota, is pleased to present this summary report as a response to Dr. Andrew Furco’s charge to explore the greatest barriers to graduate students pursuing community-engaged scholarship. Based on initial feedback from the Public Engagement Council (PEC) regarding the taskforce’s preliminary report dated February 8, 2012, I conducted additional interviews with graduate students who represent a broader constituency across campus. Following is a list of barriers and relevant recommendations:

Preliminary Report (February 8, 2012)

1. Definition
   a. Barrier: What constitutes community-engaged scholarship (CES)?
   b. Recommendation: Because students may or may not have an understanding of CES, a student-centered definition of public engagement will foster better understanding of what it means to conduct CES.

2. Visibility
   a. Barrier: Who is conducting CES? Where on and off campus does CES occur?
   b. Recommendation: (a) Make certain that faculty know about the Office for Public Engagement and other service-learning offices; and (b) Continue mapping engagement centers across the University.

3. Training
   a. Barrier: What courses exist that relate to “doing” CES?
   b. Recommendation: General and specific training must be provided at university, college, school, or department levels.

4. Support
   a. Barrier: How do students identify and work with faculty and community mentors who value CES as an integral research model that contributes to knowledge production?
   b. Recommendation: (a) Faculty should be knowledgeable about CES; (b) Training centered on CES must be provided; and (c) Funding must be offered for new and ongoing research.

5. Degree Progress
   a. Barrier: Relationship building is key to CES. How can students complete their graduate programs if it takes too long to conduct and write research?
   b. Recommendation: Students and faculty could establish a mutual agreement regarding time to degree from project initiation to completion.
Additional Barriers and Recommendations (Summer 2012)

6. Faculty and Student Partnerships
   a. Barrier: What kinds of project could I endeavor alongside a faculty mentor?
   b. Recommendation: (a) Create opportunities for both faculty mentors and their students to design together; and (b) Utilize a Greenwork team model that supports “Living Laboratories” whereby projects are connected to specific departments which in turn gives the partnerships longevity and institutional support amidst transitions in student participation.

7. Time
   a. Barrier: What if students do not have enough time to spend in community?
   b. Recommendation: (a) Create initial, smaller, or finite projects that are more easily achievable whereby the initial time commitment is not extensive. Perhaps this means beginning with service-oriented events; and (b) Share responsibilities of research with community members.

8. Student Involvement and Retention
   a. Barrier: How do you get students to engage in CES and stay involved for the duration of a project?
   b. Recommendation: (a) Provide information about CES for new graduate students at time of matriculation and orientation; and (b) Invest in recreation-type activities in community that may spawn research projects in partnership with community members/organizations; this is an opportunity for students to implement projects from their learning experience as students, contribute (or improve) to the community, and leave a legacy.

9. Division between the Office for Public Engagement (OPE) and the Graduate and Professional Student Association (GAPSA)
   a. Barrier: Is there any way that OPE and GAPSA could utilize each other’s resources to advance CES opportunities for graduate students?
   b. Recommendation: (a) Establish small-scale projects, not pie-in-the-sky projects that will help to bridge the divide; and (b) Connect the U’s research agenda to practical projects that have their provenance in short-term, service-related projects.

10. Decentralization (related to Visibility and Support – see above)
    a. Barrier: This institution is so enormous. How can students connect to the important work and the people who conduct CES?
    b. Recommendations: (a) Build networks among individual entities; (b) Connect entities across campus by encouraging engagement through incentives (e.g., financial assistance, promotion and tenure, award systems); and (c) Allow GAPSA to provide a forum for groups to discuss objectives, successes, and challenges.
Summary Statement

Community engaged scholarship is not a trend; it is a promise that graduate students and faculty make to the academies and the neighborhoods in which they are situated. A promise might state:

We are dedicated to each other and the causes that allow all of us – university and community members together – to explore positively life-enhancing, and sometimes life-changing ways to make the world better for all citizens in our communities both local and global. We understand that institutional knowledge is valuable and in sharing those resources we demonstrate an ethic of care and respect for our fields of study. Simultaneously, we believe in and are committed to the fount of knowledge that flows from the heads, hands, and hearts of our neighbors outside the academies, that their ways of knowing are equally valuable for the advancement of intellectual capital. Therefore, we promise to be good neighbors who listen thoughtfully to one another, build lasting relationships centered on trust and common cause, and widely share our discoveries so that others may benefit from what we have learned together in partnership.

Finally, I offer that we can change the research mantra from “publish or perish” to “public or perish,” and that all of us have a responsibility to make higher education relevant both inside and outside the academy. Thank you for the opportunity to talk about our graduate studies at the University of Minnesota. If you have questions, please contact me at your convenience.

Respectfully submitted,
Graduate Student Community Engaged Scholarship Taskforce

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