Final Report for the Engaged Department Grant – Department of Political Science

Team Members: Raymond Duvall, Chair; Prof. Kathryn Sikkink; Assoc. Prof. Dara Strolovitch; Assoc. Prof. Kathryn Pearson; Paul Soper, Internship Director; Rose Miskowiec, Undergraduate Advisor

Key Lessons Learned

Our team has learned several key lessons from participation in the Engaged Department Grant program. First, we learned that community engagement is a much broader concept than mere community or public service. Those latter terms have generally been used by academics to describe their efforts to educate the public about particular issues or problems. At its heart, community engagement is a cooperative effort between University staff and members of the broader community to identify problems, develop strategies and methods for studying those problems, and build solutions to those problems. While community engagement can certainly include efforts to share academic expertise with members of the broader community, it entails much more than that. It can be thought of as community-based cooperative research, learning, and teaching, from which both the academic participants and the community members benefit. Community members are thought of not merely as "clients" or "beneficiaries," but as co-participants in investigation and the production of knowledge. Academics involved in community-engaged research or teaching are thought of not merely as "experts" or "professionals" or benefactors, but as active participants in the process of community change and improvement. One of the challenges that we face going forward is to convey this broader understanding of community engagement to our faculty.

A second lesson we have learned is that the effort to expand a department's community engagement work requires much time and energy. In our case, we discovered that our plan to create a civic engagement mentor program, as it evolved, required us to seek input from all members of our department, in order to ensure that faculty were supportive of our plan. It also required us to engage with other academic units within the University, especially with those that opposed or were concerned about the impact that our plan might have on their work. These discussions and negotiations have added to the time and complexity of our effort to implement our original plan, as has concerns raised by our own faculty about various practical difficulties that our proposed reconceptualization of our Master's program presents. This was a point that Andrew Furco made throughout the grant process, and it was certainly reinforced by our own experience.

A third lesson is that the institutionalization of community engagement within a department requires that real incentives must be offered to faculty in order to secure their participation or cooperation. This remains an ongoing challenge for our department. The vast majority of political science research, and most teaching, does not currently involve community-engaged approaches. The discipline of political science rewards research conceived and conducted by political scientists largely for political scientists. This is beginning to change, but most of our faculty have been trained to gear their research for fellow political scientists, to address questions generated by political scientists, and to address problems raised mostly by political systems as wholes, or by powerful individuals or groups within those systems. In order to induce our faculty to do (or do more) community-engaged research or teaching, we must provide

institutional incentives for doing it. We have taken a positive step in this direction by directing our Promotion and Tenure Committee to make community engagement an explicit category by which all promotion and tenure cases will be judged. Faculty are now aware that they will get "credit" for doing community-engaged research. While this might be unlikely to change the practices of older faculty, younger faculty who are more prone to want to do community-engaged research now have a clear sign from the department that their efforts in this regard will in fact be recognized as a positive in their case for promotion or tenure.

Next Steps

As the department moves forward with the implementation of its current community engagement project – the re-vamped Master's program with a civic engagement mentor program at its core, a new intro course on civic engagement – we will use that Master's program to engage the faculty in discussions about possibilities for doing community-engaged teaching and research. Paul Soper, who will administer the Master's program and the mentor course, will use these as opportunities to work with individual faculty, as they work with our Master's students, to encourage them to identify suitable opportunities for community-engaged teaching and research, and to help them make connections with individuals and organizations in the community that would welcome participation in such projects. Also, as instructor of the new intro to civic engagement course, Paul Soper will begin to create a cohort of undergraduate students who can play a vital role in shaping our community engagement efforts, mostly in thinking about how to do more community-engaged teaching. At the same time, the Chair of the Department will continue to stress the benefits of community-engaged research and teaching for faculty and the community.

Recommendations

We would recommend that the Office of Public Engagement continue to provide support for faculty who are doing community-engaged teaching and research, and encouragement for those who have not yet done any. At an earlier Team Progress Report Meeting, Andrew Furco mentioned three programs that his Office will continue to offer. These three are support for Faculty Development (involving a senior faculty person mentoring a junior faculty person on how to undertake community engagement); an Engaged Scholars program, which would teach faculty how to build a research or teaching agenda around community engagement; and an Engaged Scholar Award. As we mentioned above, one of the challenges we face is in providing effective incentives for faculty to do community-engaged work. We have made important changes in our P&T criteria so that community engagement is now an explicitly recognized category that will be considered in every case. But more is needed. The three programs above provide much-needed extra-departmental support for faculty, and we strongly recommend that the University, though the Office of Public Engagement, continue these efforts. It would be extremely helpful to our faculty to have senior University faculty who have done extensive community engaged work available for consultation and advice, and to have a cohort-based model, like the Engaged Scholars Program, to provide support. The Engaged Scholar Award provides an additional incentive for our faculty, always welcome.

The Office of Public Engagement also announced that it would discontinue its Engaged Department Grant, focusing instead on providing continued to support for departments' ongoing community engagement efforts. Our department would find that very helpful, as we continue

our effort to build our Master's and Mentor programs, and to use those to persuade more faculty to do community-engaged work.

Other Observations
None at this time.

The Political Science Engaged Department Team would like to take this opportunity to thank the Office of Public Engagement and Andrew Furco, as well as the other teams in the program, for their tremendously valuable help throughout the last year. The financial assistance was very welcome, but the advice and insights provided by Andy and the other teams was even more helpful as we negotiated the challenges that we encountered in putting our plan into action. We look forward to future opportunities for further consultation.