Institutionalization of Service Learning through Extension
Cohort III: University of Minnesota Extension

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Key lessons learned in institutionalizing engagement within the department
Institutionalizing engagement within a department takes 7 – 10 years. Our team assessment score card improved by 14 points; with a 2-5 point increase in all dimensions. This is our team’s assessment, after 18 months of focused work engaging students with Extension. It would be interesting to see how a random sample of Extension educators might score the assessment.

Engaging students with Extension is easy in some circumstances where relationships with departments or systems are in place and difficult in others where there has been less involvement. If faculty members have some history engaging students they are more inclined to see opportunities for partnerships, acknowledge what students are capable of doing, and appreciate the added value students bring back to the classroom. Engaged students provide community stories and experiences that enhance the classroom curriculum.

If faculty members have little experience engaging students in the community it is a greater challenge to create interest. Engagement in the community appears to be a lot of extra work; organizing and managing partners and students. Without community relationships where do you start? One of the barriers revealed is that faculty don’t know how to do this; how do you find students, and assure their engagement in the community is mutually beneficial? We have learned there are numerous supporting units on campus, such as the Community Service-Learning Center, that assist faculty manage details by matching students with community organization interests.

Extension has not had an institutionalized system for engaging university students. The only exception is the 4-H Summer Assistant Program which hires 25 - 30 college students each summer to work in county Extension offices to support the 4-H Youth Development program.

We started our effort by individually interviewing 23 Extension faculty (1/3 of the total) to identify how they currently engage students, and to explain our initiative and interest in engaging more students with Extension. We compiled and analyzed the data. We also discussed the results and implications for Extension as a group. We learned Extension teaching faculty are engaging students through community group projects or field trip assessments, but not through service-learning courses. Through the course of our interviews, faculty who knew Extension and service-learning often suggested an independent or directed study or internship
program would work better for student engagement with Extension. After these interviews, we started framing our concept more broadly as student engagement versus service-learning.

We met with Laurel Hirt and Monica Seims, from the Community Service-Learning Center to learn about their services including the student website. We met with Sara Newberg, Program Director Student Affairs St. Paul Campus to learn about their student website. After meeting with Anise McDowell, Coordinator Multicultural Center for Academic Excellence Office Equity and Diversity, she also offered their website to connect with students. Our team met with Andy Furco in January to discuss what we were learning and to identify next steps. The discussion helped us turn our attention on maximizing existing University systems to achieve our goals.

We also met with faculty members in different departments to discuss mutually beneficial opportunities. We met with CFANS faculty members, Jay Bell, Bill Ganzlin, David Smith, and Kevin Smith to explore how our interests aligned with their college priorities. They invited us to attend their curriculum policy and review committee to discuss mutual interests across each department. We had a similar meeting with Dr. Jerry Stein, CEHD School of Social Work, regarding the Master Education Professional Studies in Youth Development Leadership. Clear steps were identified to bring Extension into the classroom to engage with students. These individual meetings helped to inform our process and to make connections on campus.

We are working with the Associate Deans and program leaders within our 4 Centers to provide support and validation. Our team is comprised of 1-2 members from each Center who also provide ideas, enthusiasm, and encouragement for engaging students. Each team member has created examples of actual and potential opportunities for student engagement within their Center for summer or fall semester as a way to help Extension faculty see the benefits of student engagement and ways to engage students. These examples are referred to as Student Engagement Examples (SEE).

Though the grant process and other Office of Public Engagement meetings we have been able to discuss Extension’s interest in student engagement with faculty from other collegiate departments. Through these meeting, we found that in addition to other methods “word of mouth” can foster unexpected student/Extension matches which has been encouraging.

**Next steps within the department or unit to continue the institutionalization process**

Extension Fall Program Conference in October is an opportunity to have a workshop or poster session to promote and educate colleagues on the various ways they can build relationships with departments and provide engaged opportunities for students.

The 15 Extension Student Engagement Examples (SEE) will be shared with Extension program teams, program leaders, and educators to foster creative ideas on how students could be engaged with Extension work. Along with the SEE a fact sheet is being developed, “How to Find a Student.” The fact sheet addresses what students need to know about a program, and how to post on-line engagement opportunities for students. There are numerous on-line listings
that students at the University frequent to find service-learning sites, internships, independent study opportunities, and jobs.

If lack of resources to pay interns becomes a barrier to finding students to work with Extension, we will seek funding opportunities. We have been warned by faculty members in CFANS that we will be competing with Agri-business paid internships.

Both formally and informally we will continue to promote and market opportunities for students to engage with Extension. We will use existing University systems to promote engagement opportunities within Extension. Diana Martenson will continue to provide leadership for the initiative, coordinating functions will be adjusted over time as needed. We are confident student engagement will grow within Extension as more teaching faculty and Extension educators have positive experiences and relationships are built across academic units.

**Recommendations for the engaged department program**
The engaged department grant provides incentive that might not otherwise be there, we recommend the continuation of the program incorporating changes suggested by participants and the Office for Public Engagement. We have learned that the institutionalizing of engagement within a department takes time and intentional effort. The developmental grant has provided knowledge and support, financial incentive, interaction and touch points with other university departments, and accountability. We expect our team will remain active and interested in promoting and supporting student engagement through Extension, which begs the question, how are you assessing accomplishments over a longer period of time? Will you ask the cohort III department teams a year from now, to submit an Assessment Rubric For Institutionalizing Community Engagement in Higher Education, or use another assessment to determine outcomes and impacts?

The completion of self-selected engagement initiatives by 22 University departments over three years is significant. Not only has the advancement of engagement within each department started to shift, but connections have been created around a common interest in the value of public engagement with departments that rarely if ever intersect at the University. Over-time the University will reflect the cultural shift in engaged teaching, research, and outreach.

**Discuss other issues or observations you have**
There is new initiative on campus that is gaining interest and momentum that has the potential to enhance the institutionalization of public engagement within the University particularly through interdisciplinary work addressing important issues facing Minnesotans.

InCommons is a community of purpose, where people come together based on everything they have in common and everything they hope to achieve. InCommons connects Minnesotans through engagement and online networking so they can find and share creditable tools, knowledge and resources to solve community problems. The InCommons in-person gatherings
provide meaningful ways for people to connect with each other through an engaging process to move toward solving problems in their communities.

Approximately 100 University faculty and staff have been trained in the *Art of Hosting and Harvesting Conversations That Matter*. Fifty additional faculty and staff will be trained in June. A University cohort comprised of Art of Hosting trained facilitators has been organized; they met for the first time in April. Based on the enthusiasm and ideas generated that day, this is likely to be a very committed and engaged group with the potential of influencing engagement across the University.