

CAUCE Research Report

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Supporting community-university engagement: A study of organizational structures at Canadian universities with particular attention to University Continuing Education

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of how community-university engagement (CUE) is supported at CAUCE institutions; identify which of our continuing education units are playing major roles in providing support; and share information with other units interested in learning from these exemplars. It is anticipated that the results of this study will help inform the strategic planning of CAUCE member organizations.

Methodology

The primary research questions investigated in this qualitative study are:

1. How is community engagement currently supported within the structure of Canadian universities, and
2. What role does UCE have in relationship to this structure?

In order to gain understanding of the role and level of support provided by UCE units in Canada the structure and nature of community engagement was assessed based on whether or not it is:

- Centralized within the university's UCE unit (UCE is the primary unit for community engagement activities);
- Centralized within a unit other than UCE;
- Decentralized across the university -- UCE supports community engagement as part of its own work within the university (highlighted in the UCE academic or unit plan) but has no particular institution--wide responsibility for community university engagement; or
- Neither featured within the mission or goals of the university nor formally acknowledged in UCE's academic or unit plan.

The project was conducted in two parts. A review of the websites of selected Canadian universities was completed in order to gain understanding of the kinds of engagement activities highlighted at individual universities and who was responsible for them. The following steps were implemented:

Part 1. Website survey

In order to ensure consistency in data gathering the key words and definitions were identified along with a web survey approach. This was piloted using the website of one comprehensive university. Following the pilot, changes were

made to the data collection form. Twenty universities were selected based on geographic location (east, west and central) and function (medical/doctoral, comprehensive, primarily undergraduate). The web search pathway was as follows: university main page, keyword: engagement; senior administration main page, keyword: mission statement, continuing education unit main page, and keyword: continuing education, sub-word: community engagement. Results from the website survey helped to inform the nature and organization of the questions developed for the interviews with CAUCE member Deans and Directors of continuing education units.

Part 2. Interviews with Deans and Directors

The second phase of the study focused on collecting data from individual interviews with nine Deans and Directors (or designates) of university continuing education units in Canada. Individuals were selected based on the geographic location and function of their university (see selection process identified in Part 1). Semi-structured interviews were chosen as a way to ensure consistency in terms of questions and allow for individual comments and reflections. Study participants received a confirmation of the interview and a copy of the questions in advance. All interviews were taped with permission and stored on an e-class site (moodle) for review by the researchers. The research assistant transcribed the key points and summary responses. The analysis of the findings was guided by a review of the currently literature relating to how CUE is situated in Canadian universities and its relationship to the historic and current role of continuing education.

Situating engagement in higher education: A review of the literature

The need for infrastructure support for community engagement within higher education institutions is identified from a number of different perspectives. The follow sections identify some of the key articles along with a review of the UCE literature relating to the role of continuing education in community engagement.

a. Interest and support for community engagement:

In the past two decades there has been a growing interest in exploring the theory and practice relating to engagement. Boyer's seminal work: *Scholarship reconsidered: Priorities of the professoriate* (1990) provides a view of scholarship that integrates and synthesizes discovery with application and teaching bringing together the university and society. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching defines engagement within the context of higher education as "the collaboration between institutions of higher education 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" (2006). In *Returning to our roots: The engaged institution* five recommendations for engagement are listed: the development of an engagement plan, faculty incentives, funding, support for interdisciplinary research and highlighting engagement in the institution's mission statement

(Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities, 1999). The work of Boyer, the Carnegie Foundation and the Kellogg Commission has informed approaches to community engagement in Canada. While at the present time there is no pan Canadian community engagement classification system or coordinating entity, there are a number of CUE centers and institutes along with funding opportunities, declarations and national networks that support engagement and engaged scholarship.

b. Organizational structures supporting community engagement:

In 2005, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching responded to the growing interest from higher education for formal recognition of engagement by adding curricular engagement, outreach and partnerships to their classification system (2006). Until 2010, universities needed to meet minimum requirements in either curricular engagement or outreach and partnerships. Since 2010, universities seeking classification as an “engaged university” must be able to provide information and examples of community engagement relating to service learning, learning outcomes, curriculum integration, faculty-engaged scholarship, outreach programs, institutional resources and community partnerships and feedback and assessment of these partnerships (2010). Hence, the successful attainment of the Carnegie classification requires the development of formalized support for engagement within the institution.

The idea that community engagement activities must be institutionalized within each university is common throughout the literature on engagement. According to Bringle and Hatcher (2000) the institutionalization of service learning is represented in a number of ways within the university including: in the mission statement, through publicity and budget allocations, within the organization’s infrastructure and in faculty roles and rewards. Weerts (2007) suggests there are six distinct benefits for institutions that adopt an engagement agenda. One of these benefits refers to the establishment of “porous structures” that support the social good, assist with transdisciplinarity and help to break down the ivory tower culture of the university (p. 88).

In Canada, there are a number of different kinds of entities within higher education that are focusing on providing support for engagement activities; however, there is no one specific organizational style. Some universities have established a centre or institute for community engagement; others have adopted a decentralized approach. In a *Scan of engagement structures in Canadian universities* (Mizra, 2011) the author identifies the lead units and approaches to community engagement in 32 universities. The majority of units identified in this scan are specially designated centres or institutes focusing on issues or approaches relating to the social economy, service learning and community engaged coursework.

While many universities in both Canada and the United States describe either a centralized or a decentralized approach, Pigza and Troppe (2003) offer a model of engagement that includes three types of organizational structures: centralized, fragmented and integrated. According to the authors, centralized structures are highly organized units that tend to focus on a specialized theme or approach while fragmented structures offer engagement activities that are organized by a number of individuals and units within the institution. Fragmented structures are more fluid given that the activities are dispersed through the organization; however, these kinds of structures are subject to duplication and gaps in services. In their view, integrated approaches that incorporate aspects of centralized and fragmented structures offer a permeable structure that is best suited to the changing nature of community--university engagement (Pigza & Troppe, 2003).

Much of the literature focuses on faculty driven centers or institutes; however, there are some references to the role that continuing education can play in supporting CUE in the future. In the *Centrality of Engagement in Higher Education* (Bruns, Fitzgerald, Furco, Sonka & Swanson, 2011), the authors suggest that universities evaluate the impact and contributions of existing outreach units such as continuing education. The notion of the ever changing needs and nature of community engagement also fits with continuing education units given that most units have had to reinvent themselves at least a few times and are very aware of the need to adapt to changes.

Peterson (2001) submits that UCE units can strengthen their relationships with others within the institution by aligning their work more closely with the university's mission. Based on the UCE literature this notion is supported by others who suggest that UCE is well positioned to connect communities with the university (Hall, 2009, Jackson, 2010; McLean, Thompson & Jonker, 2006; McRae, 2012). Despite these claims, there is limited research identifying how UCE can be repositioned to support engagement. In a study of engagement practices in seven American universities McLean, Thompson and Jonker identify that most engagement units develop from a university--wide council or task force (2006). In two of these universities the existing continuing education unit was included within the engagement centre (McLean, Thompson & Jonker, 2006). McRae (2009) believes that UCE units can support the university's engagement mission by adopting a community engagement model within the practice. This model would provide a framework for developing a common understanding of engagement within the unit and with stakeholders and encourage the establishment of community-university partnerships and methods for measuring outcomes. Gaining an understanding of the organizational structures supporting university community engagement may assist with the development of engagement models within UCE units.

At the present time there are no studies identifying how UCE units in Canada are structured in ways that contribute to their university's community engagement

mission; however, there are a number of articles that suggest UCE units could become more involved in supporting engagement activities. This study addresses a gap in the literature relating to how UCE units are structured in support of community engagement.

Summary of Findings

The website scan search identified that the majority of comprehensive and primarily undergraduate universities in the study identify engagement in their mission statement. The smaller universities also tended to have more evidence of a designated unit, a formalized position and evidence of some kind of inventory of engagement (Figure 1.1). A centralized or coordinated approach was not apparent at medical doctoral universities; however, many of these universities provided information and attachments about their specific engagement activities and referenced engagement in their reports.

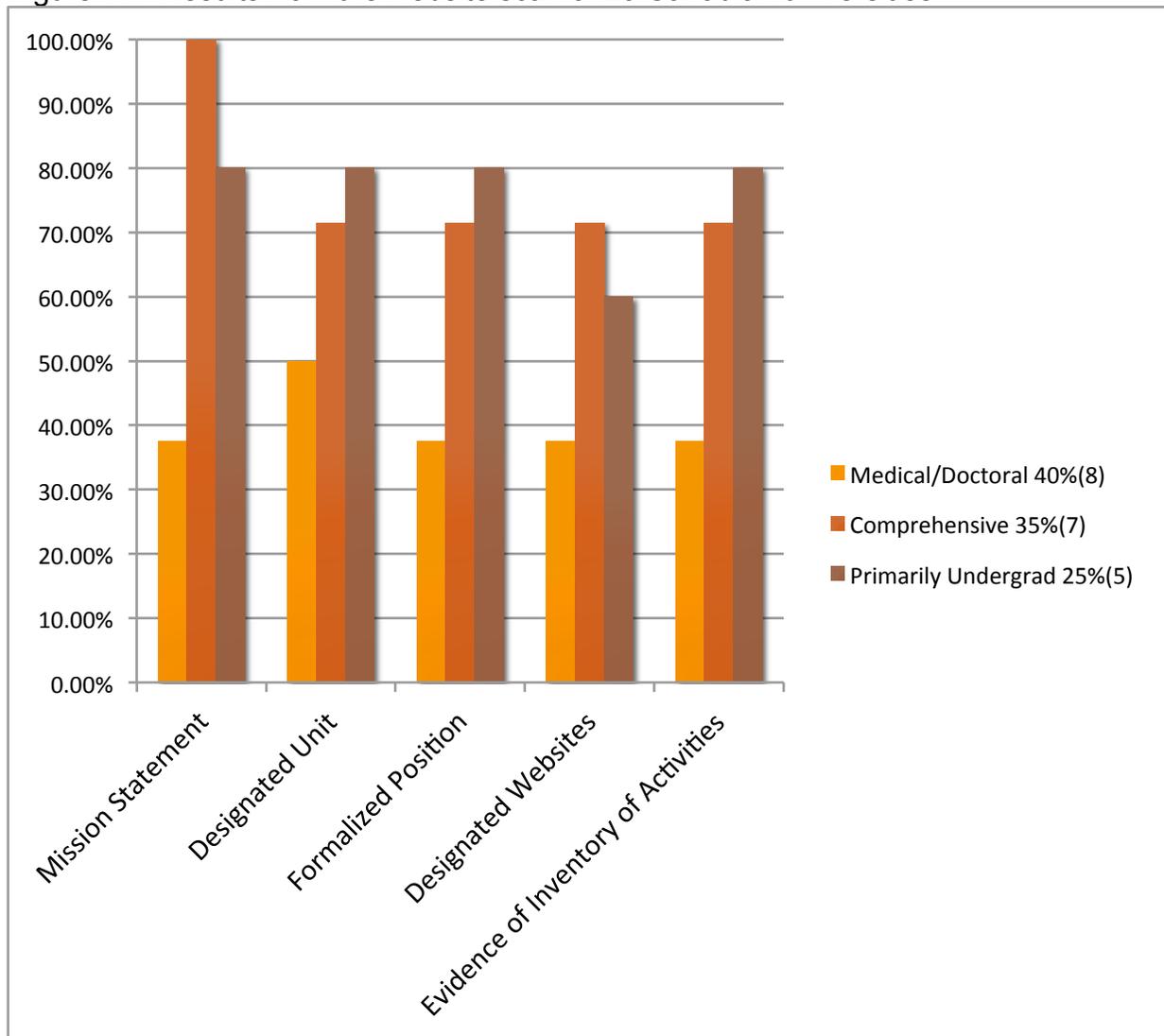
The individual interviews with CAUCE Deans and Directors provided information than was not available through the university web pages. An analysis of the data from the interviews suggests that each institution is highly contextualized; there is no consensus on terminology on what constitutes community engagement activity within or across institutions; and activities are constantly changing making it difficult to develop or maintain an inventory. There was also little agreement about the structure of engagement in the future, about half of the respondents identified that they believe not much will change concerning the organization of community university engagement while others suggested there would be on-going changes in their institution.

Conclusion

Based on the information provided by the respondents it appears that within continuing education the historical “extension” roots of the practice has influenced how engagement is perceived. Many of the Deans and Directors referred to CUE as an embedded notion that permeated through the unit’s programs and activities. The lack of clarity or agreement around what constitutes CUE was apparent; the definition of engagement and information relating to how it was operationalized and measured varied with each respondent. A number of the Deans and Directors indicated that engagement is an outcome of all of their programs; others suggested that only some of their activities could be classified as engagement. Most individuals identified that engagement within their institution was fragmented and not well understood within the institution.

Only a small number of CAUCE Deans and Directors were interviewed for this study; therefore, it is difficult to draw conclusions based on the data collected to date. Furthermore, community engagement approaches are constantly changing making it difficult to identify a clear picture of how community engagement is situated in Canada. In order to gain a better understanding about how community engagement is currently featured the study will be expanded to include more primarily undergraduate and comprehensive universities.

Figure 1.1 Results from the website scan of 20 Canadian universities



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