Do institutional policies incentivize engaged scholarship?

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A call for examining academic incentive structures

Academic customs create a “small but persistent ‘drag’” on researchers who would like to do interdisciplinary work and engaged scholarship.

NAKFI challenge 2005 report

Whitmer et al., 2010. Front Ecol Environ
A call for examining academic incentive structures

**Academic customs** create a “small but persistent ‘drag’” on researchers who would like to do interdisciplinary work and engaged scholarship.

Specifically, the academic promotion system and department-based budgeting structures.

*Whitmer et al., 2010. Front Ecol Environ*
A call for examining academic incentive structures

Overcoming institutional barriers requires that universities incorporate community engagement into their core missions, strategic-planning efforts, and tenure and promotion criteria.

Whitmer et al., 2010. Front Ecol Environ
A call for examining academic incentive structures

“The data suggest a disconnect between what institutions say they want (i.e., engaged faculty) and institutionalized practices of faculty reward.”

Whitmer et al., 2010. Front Ecol Environ
Hypothesis: There is a disconnect between what institutions say they want (engaged faculty) and institutionalized practices of faculty reward.

Is this true of our universities?
Hypothesis: There is a disconnect between what institutions say they want (engaged faculty) and institutionalized practices of faculty reward.

1) What do they say they want?
Hypothesis: There is a disconnect between what institutions say they want (engaged faculty) and institutionalized practices of faculty reward.

2) What do they reward?
Hypothesis: There is a disconnect between what institutions say they want (engaged faculty) and institutionalized practices of faculty reward.

3) What’s going on behind the scenes?
Methods

• What do institutions say they want?
  • Content analysis of institutional mission statements

• What do they reward?
  • Content analysis of promotion and tenure (P&T) policies

UCLA reaches beyond campus boundaries to establish partnerships locally and globally. We seek to serve society through both teaching and scholarship, to educate successive generations of leaders, and to pass on to students a renewable set of skills and commitment to social engagement.
Methods

• What do institutions say they want?
  • Content analysis of institutional mission statements

• What do they reward?
  • Content analysis of promotion & tenure policies

• What’s going on behind the scenes?
  • Analyzed survey results from Beyond the Academy network members
24 Mission statements

- Arizona State University
- Colorado College
- Colorado State University
- Cornell University
- Duke University
- McGill University
- The Nature Conservancy
- Ohio State University
- Stanford University
- Stockholm Resilience Centre
- University of California L.A.
- University of California Santa Cruz
- University of Cambridge
- University College Cork
- University of Colorado, Boulder
- University of Georgia
- University of Hawaii, Manoa
- University of Maryland
- University of Michigan
- University of Minnesota
- University of Oxford
- University of Vermont
- University of Washington
- Yale University
What do institutions say they want?

- Public service: 90%
- Public engagement: 70%
- Multi/Interdisciplinarity: 40%
- Collaboration outside academia: 30%
- Problem solving: 20%
- Local community impact: 10%

Results

n = 24
Examples: public service vs. engagement

Public service:
• “...a commitment to excellence in public service, economic development, and technical assistance activities designed to address the strategic needs of the state of Georgia...” – University of Georgia

Public engagement:
• “Co-develop solutions to the critical social, technical, cultural and environmental issues facing 21st century Arizona” - Arizona State

Typical:
• "Fostering a culture of engagement and service" - Ohio State
Review of Promotion & Tenure Policies

- 28 documents submitted representing 11 institutions
- 19 at departmental or college level
- 9 at institution level
Review of Promotion & Tenure Policies

- Arizona State University
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- University of Maryland
- University of Michigan
- University of Minnesota
- University of Oxford
- University of Vermont
- University of Washington
- Yale University
General document format

• Few examples with required metrics – typically up to candidate to choose
• Typical format is a list of suggested areas of focus
General document format

- Few examples with required metrics – typically up to candidate to choose
- Sometimes “basket of metrics” more explicit

“Some or all of the listed documents in Appendix C may be submitted in the portfolios to support claims made by a candidate for promotion…both qualitative and quantitative measures will be applied.”

- University College Cork (Ireland)
General document format

• Few examples with required metrics – typically up to candidate to choose

• Notable exception: CU Boulder Sociology uses 100% metrics
Results

Top criteria in tenure documents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peer-reviewed publications</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring/advising students</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-campus service</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public service</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grants won</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student teaching evaluations</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional society activities</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awards</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status in scientific community</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer teaching reviews</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Focus on quality vs. quantity:

“Judgment of strength and excellence in teaching and research is based on a balance of qualitative and quantitative factors…” – UMN Ecology

“Quantitative criteria do not supersede judgment of the quality of scholarship, instruction, mentoring, service, and outreach.” – UGA Forestry
Results

- Education of external audiences
- Extension
- Advising role for government/practitioners
- Consulting
- White papers
- Patents

What do institutions/departments reward?

- Public service (percentage of tenure documents)
- Societal/global impact
- Public engagement
- Multi/interdisciplinarity
- Collaboration outside academia
- Problem solving
- Local community impact

n = 28
Results

“Interdisciplinary and collaborative works are valid forms of scholarly activity and will be judged as such as long as each candidate gives clear evidence of his/her participation in each instance.”
– University of Georgia
Results

Public service, societal impact, public engagement, and outside collaboration more commonly prioritized in mission statements than tenure documents.
Results

• Some institutions set guidelines for departmental P&T policies. Others do not.
• High within-institution variability. Some departments have no P&T documentation whatsoever.
Online survey

• Online survey distributed to Beyond the Academy network members
• 17 questions about the degree to which departments and institutions encourage or discourage engaged scholarship
• n = 22
Results

My institution supports engaged scholarship.

My department supports engaged scholarship.
Results

If I participate in engaged scholarship, I will be rewarded professionally.
Results

Faculty/researchers at my institution are more likely to be promoted if they pursue engaged scholarship.
Results

My institution provides good resources to help me involve outside audiences in my research.
Barriers to doing engaged work: time

“The primary barrier to engagement is its value at the time of tenure, where departments are judging the importance of engagement relative to other professional accomplishments.”

“It takes more time, and thus reduces overall productivity.”
“University want staff to give service to society but their structures and processes don't really recognise the contribution (and nor do many faculty peers)”

“And engaged scholarship is valued in theory, but not in relation to hiring and tenure decisions in any policy-level or significant way.”

“At the end of the day, funding and publication matter the most in merit and academic culture.”
Hypothesis: There is a disconnect between what institutions say they want (engaged faculty) and institutionalized practices of faculty reward.

• **What do institutions say they want?**
  • Public service and societal/global impact present in 91% of mission statements.
  • Less emphasis on public engagement (45%), interdisciplinarity (36%), outside collaboration (23%) and problem solving (23%)

• **What do they reward?**
  • Top 3: Peer-reviewed publications, mentoring students, on-campus service
  • Public service mentioned in 71% of tenure documents
  • Impact or engagement mentioned in <20% of tenure documents

• **What’s going on behind the scenes?**
  • Institutional and departmental support for engaged work, but time commitment and lack of recognition are major barriers
Take-home messages

• Various forms of public service emphasized in tenure documents, but survey results indicated engaged work not often prioritized in practice. Time constraints and lack of recognition are major barriers.
Take-home messages

• High variation in assessment and reward structures at the departmental level.
• Departmental culture often not reflected in policy language.
Examples of progress from the literature

• Michigan State University revised its P&T guidelines to better align faculty rewards with institutional values of outreach and engagement (Doberneck & Fitzgerald 2008)

• Imagining America: Artists and Scholars in Public Life (imaginingamerica.org) established a “tenure team” to develop policies and processes that value public scholarship and engagement (Cantor & Lavine 2006)

• The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (CFAT) has an application process for distinguishing academic institutions based on how well their missions and practices include community engagement (Driscoll 2009)

• The American Anthropological Association recommends universities adopt National Science Foundation (US) standards for assessing research impact.
  • NSF: What may be the benefits of the proposed activity to society? How well does the proposed activity broaden the participation of underrepresented groups?
References

• Whitmer et al. 2010. The engaged university: providing a platform for research that transforms society. Front Ecol Environ.