

**Returning to Our Roots – The Engaged Institution:
Perceptions of College of Agriculture Faculty, Staff and Administrators**

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Abstract

*Significant movement is afoot in land-grant colleges of agriculture around a reinvigoration of institutional engagement as well as efforts to reform the 'ivory tower' from societal isolation and irrelevance. This movement is based on the claim that land-grant institutions should play a key role in sustaining our democracy and collaborating to solve complex societal problems. Against this backdrop, in February 1999, the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities issued the third of its reports, *Returning to Our Roots: The Engaged Institution* (NASULGC, 1999), calling for greater institutional engagement with society. In light of the Kellogg Commission report, the purpose of this research project was to obtain empirical evidence of the perceptions held by college of agriculture faculty, staff and administrators regarding the engagement initiative.*

Introduction/Theoretical Framework

In 1999, a watershed document by the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities, entitled *The Engaged Institution* (NASULGC, 1999), confronted state and land grant universities across the United States. This document has had an immense impact on universities and notably, land-grant colleges of agriculture (LGCA). It addressed the inadequacies of the present state university and land grant college system and emphasized the need to go beyond outreach and service to “engagement.” In the end, the Commission recommended that institutional leaders develop plans for engagement, “plans that recognize engagement as not something separate and distinct from the university [college] but part of its core mission” (p. 31).

Prior to the Kellogg Commission, James Meyer, Chancellor Emeritus, University of California-Davis in his *Rethinking the Outlook of Colleges Whose Roots Have Been in Agriculture* (1992) document defined the problems of the LGCAs and called for an in-depth investigation. Meyer’s next document, *The Stalemate in Food and Agricultural Research, Teaching and Extension* (1993), examined the problem of why these colleges have not changed as rapidly as they might have, and concluded that the stalemate was due to the mindset, uncertain mission, ineffective leadership, and inappropriate organizations. That is, Meyer concluded “they need help to escape from old ideas, which means escaping from old organizations built on the past” (p. 10).

Meyer’s third study, *Transforming the Land Grant College of Agriculture for the Twenty-First Century* (1995), examined how to make changes in possibly one of the most intractable of all organizations – the university. Meyer (1995) declared “today’s Land Grant College of Agriculture’s are mature organizations in need of revitalization and renewal” (p. 1). In his fourth study, *Re-Engineering the Land Grant College of Agriculture* (1997), Meyer concluded, “the LGCA has reached a defining moment in its history” (p. 3), and declared “to reinvent the land-grant college, efforts of individual colleges to change should begin from the bottom up, institution by institution, not from the top down” (p. 5). Furthermore, a challenge was issued by Meyer (1997) to develop a well-thought-out process for reengineering the land grant college of agriculture and encouraged the development of a “strategic plan” to re-engineer itself to meet its own needs. Meyer (1997) stated:

“There is no clear blueprint for academia to follow in remodeling itself. The great variation among the individual LGCAs means each must develop its own blueprints for local use” (p. v).

However, as the Kellogg Commission (NASULGC, 1999) declared, “developing such a plan will be challenging. But time and trouble invested in the effort at the front end will pay significant dividends down the line” (p. 32). According to Rowley, Lujan, and Dolence (1997) “strategic planning is a formal process designed to help a college identify and maintain an optimal alignment with the most important elements the environment within which the university resides” (p. 14). This environment consists of “the political, social, economic, technological, and educational ecosystem, both internal and external to the university” (Rowley, Lujan, & Dolence, 1997, p. 15). Therefore, if

institutional engagement is to succeed within the LGCA, it is imperative to conduct a needs assessment of faculty, staff and administrators.

Purpose and Objectives

The primary purpose of this study was to identify and examine the perceptions held by faculty, staff and administrators from a Midwest land-grant college of agriculture regarding implementing recommendations from the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities' third report *The Engaged Institution* (NASULGC, 1999). A second purpose was to describe the implications of these perceptions as they relate to the process of planning for institutional engagement.

To achieve the aforementioned purposes the following objectives guided this study:

1. To identify what steps are needed to ensure that the College of Agriculture is truly attentive, responsive and interactive with its constituency?
2. What steps need to be taken by faculty, administration and staff to encourage joint academic-community definitions to problems, solutions, and success?
3. What are LGCA faculty, staff and administrator opinions regarding the importance of maintaining a stance of academic neutrality as outlined by the Kellogg Commission?
4. Identify examples of how LGCA faculty, staff and administrator believe or do not believe will make LCGA's "easier to do business with?"
5. Identify what measures should be taken to assist with integrating the engagement agenda with the research, teaching and outreach mission of the LGCA?
6. Ascertain the actions needed to ensure that the internal structure of the LGCA embraces the engagement agenda?
7. What type of alliances and strategic partnerships do faculty, staff and administrator believe are currently in place or need to be developed to acquire resources to set the institutional engagement agenda in motion?

Procedure/Methods

The target population for this study consisted of faculty, staff and administrators from a Midwest Land-Grant College of Agriculture. To address the question of "What perceptions do faculty, staff and administrators from a Midwest land-grant college of agriculture hold regarding implementing recommendations from the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities' third report *The Engaged Institution?*" the researcher implemented a set of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) methods to elicit empirically-based inductive descriptions of engagement characteristics from LGCA faculty, staff, and administrators. The methods included an Internet open-ended survey (Dillman, 2000), document analysis (Forster, 1994), participant observation (Waddington, 1994), brainstorming (Jones, 1992), think-aloud method (Nielsen & Mack, 1994), question-asking (Johnson & Briggs, 1994), and elite interviews (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). These techniques elicited the current perceptions of LGCA faculty, staff and administrators towards the seven-part test of engagement developed by the Kellogg Commission (NASULGC, 1999). The researchers developed a series of initial descriptions of institutional engagement within Colleges of Agriculture based on the data

gathered from these methods. These descriptions were verified by the organizations themselves and then compared to one another.

Findings and Analysis

The respondents described a mosaic of approaches to the institutional engagement seven-part test. The following section provides an overview of respondent demographics and areas that emerged as key issues to consider when implementing the engagement initiative within a LGCA.

Demographic Data

From the responses of 192 faculty, staff and administrators, 77% (n=148) were faculty, 8% (n=16) were staff and 14% (n=28) were administrators. Of the 176 faculty and administrator respondents, nearly half 42% (n=74) held the rank of associate professor, 19% (n=33) were ranked as full professor and the remaining 39% (n=69) were at the assistant professor ranking. As per the number of years associated with the institution 10% (n=20) have been 0-5 years; 19% (n=36) 6-10 years; 14% (n=26) 11-15 years; 10% (n=20) 16-20 years; 25% (n=48) 21-25 years; 14% (n=26) 26-30 years; and 8% (n=16) 31+ years. More than half (61%) of the respondents had tenure.

Internal College Issues to Confront

As a center for research and the development of technology, the college fulfills both epistemological and economic roles. A center for research suggests a professor-centered arena where success depends on research grants and publications. In a discussion on the dilemmas of choice facing research universities, Cole (1994) points out that academic leaders recruit and support scientists and scholars who have made or are apt to make seminal discoveries — those who define fields and specialties. The emphasis is on the production of new knowledge. In looking at the engagement initiative, several respondents concur with Cole, and the following statement is reflective of their responses:

We need to hire the best-trained, broad based scholars in our fields. At first blush, this may not sound like the answer, but I firmly believe that it is a critical part of providing effective interaction with our constituents. The biggest mistake we make in hiring is to focus jobs and job descriptions narrowly on single areas. Faculty are around the university for 30+ years, but the important issues of the day change on a regular basis. If we are to seriously serve our constituents in the long term, we need to continue to hire outstanding scholars with broad interests and technical abilities so they can work on the ever-changing problems and issues of the day. (Professor)

Corollary to recruitment and support emphasis, however, is the application of knowledge through integration and application, and expertise appears to be the defining criterion. In this role, the LGCA has a contract with society to supply expertise in the form of problem solutions or the next cohort of experts, and the public has a direct stake in the outcomes. Two respondents noted that in order to advance the engagement initiative the current emphasis on expert-model may need to be reconsidered.

In my opinion the first step towards institutional engagement would be to develop a true process whereby [the institution] 'shakes' its' big-brother, all-knowing, expert-model image. (Associate Professor)

It appears that we first need to admit that we do have an expert-model focus, rather than a societal needs focus, than admit that changing that philosophy will be very, very difficult, followed by expending resources to develop new processes for dialoguing with our publics, and than finally reward change in our processes that salute and work toward permeability. (Associate Professor)

The roles of LGCA as intellectual centers, research producers, and societal developers often overlap. Advocates of one or another role are more likely to divide along disciplinary lines than according to type of role one plays in the institution (faculty, staff, and administrators). Widely apparent in responses from the respondents, was the demand being placed on LGCA to shift priorities and to respond to a wider constituency base. Specific examples of how societal issues can be addressed and the LGCA can become responsive to societal needs was provided by the following respondents.

Place priority on the needs of our stakeholders. Right now I think that we are often driven by dollars rather than serving the needs of people. This is not in step with the land-grant philosophy. (Assistant Professor)

We need to make sure that we are cognizant of the portions of the constituency that are non-farm stakeholders. Agriculture, and our mission relative to it, involves much more than the traditional approaches to clientele needs. Urban and community agriculture are much broader than farming, and they require that we address those needs in novel ways. (Associate Professor)

We need to really listen to agriculture and natural resources interests and truly seek their input. To date, it seems that we just listen to the organized commodity groups that are little more than lobbyists for a rather narrow group of agricultural special interests. Agriculture, to be viable in the future, MUST be more flexible, sustainable and broad--and, if we are to actually be "ag and natural resources," then we must seek out the opinions of both urban and rural people about natural resource issues and concerns. This includes people, agencies and organizations that know little about agriculture (in the traditional sense) but know and care a lot about Iowa, about its culture, and about all of its natural resources. (Professor)

Criterion of Exclusive Competence

To differentiate the nature of the LGCA's mission within the larger community, one important criterion is whether some other social agency can respond to the problem or whether only the college is equipped to deal with it. By accepting the transfer of resources from a community, locally or more broadly, the college commits itself to deliver certain services to the community. One respondent explained why direction to knowledge is just as important as discovering knowledge:

The capacity to serve our stakeholders in diverse ways is the most critical aspect of engagement. If we are even perceived as just another group promoting self-interest, we will not be listened to or, as often, invited to speak. If we cannot give sound, knowledgeable, scholarly answers, we should reference the questions to someone who can. Helping people to find the right answers is as important as having the right. (Professor)

LGCAs in particular may feel flooded by demands to respond to a wide variety of needs, more so when the resources that are required to respond exceed those the college has. When resources to the college are being cut back at the same time, a redefinition of the role that affects how the college operates becomes imperative. One respondent noted that this redefinition of engagement has an impact on several levels.

The public is redefining their expectations of the university as usual. Policy makers (like the Kellogg Foundation), those people who provide funding to the university, are reexamining this redefinition, not only within light of their own organizational value system but in light of what the constituency argues the university should do. Yet, many often overlook the simple premises, that if engagement is to take hold in the university it needs to be made a consistent and important part of the university recognition and reward system. It cannot be RESEARCH and GRANTS and PUBLICATIONS and then teaching and then extension, and then "service." In and of itself service is a relatively non-scholarly term. Evidence of "engagement" should be considered a core and fundamental part of research, teaching and extension. Not just outreach as is classical for extension but listening and responding. (Professor)

The following respondents provide two concrete examples of how college faculty have been given freedom to define their role and disconnect from society.

To cut to the chase, most of us are impossibly saturated with activities and the notion that yet another sink for our time exists is overwhelming. We deal with this at the organizational level by making it the responsibility of some of us to be people who represent us with the public and who should channel appropriate information to the remainder of us when relevant. This second step is completely broken down for a number of reasons. One clear reason is that in the internal "hierarchy of prestige" researchers who draw large external grants and busy themselves with techniques do not feel beholden to anyone else, least of all extension personnel with ideas that come from the community level. Simply put the incentives and rewards that most matter to career-minded faculty at universities have little to nothing to do with public and social goals in practice, though in theory these themes are loudly touted. (Professor)

One of the criticisms being leveled at any research university is that the focus and the emphasis is too much on research and not enough on providing a quality education or serving the needs of the larger community. I think that those charges are to some extent accurate, but they dismiss what the university or College of Agriculture really does for a community. This is a very complex place,

and there are a lot of things that affect its operation...the operational load of this college like others was based on a time when there was access to a lot of resources so that we could follow different directions. In the process of doing that, not only did we overextend ourselves but we created certain expectations that we were not able to meet for a variety of reasons. I think now we need to say, "What are those expectations, and which ones can we adequately meet, and which ones can we not meet and maybe are the province of some other group?"
(Professor)

It is imperative to analyze what roles other social agencies can accomplish, as a means of limiting the pressure to fulfill all of society's needs and thus, diverting attention from what is most critical for the LGCA to accomplish. One respondent took stock in the competency the college should provide in meeting changes in society.

The college should maintain an image as a source of objective science, for that is our only real claim to fame. If our image is tainted by research funded by outside sources of major money (some even having proprietary claims), maintenance of the facilitator with no position, or extension programs for only those who pay, our claim is undermined. There are times when the science of a situation must be laid out for the benefit of society even though it is politically unwanted at the time. Only through providing objective science can the college maintain a role in society that is important and is unique. (Associate Professor)

As this respondent's statement encapsulates, it is clear that the advancement of knowledge is the most central mission to a university or college. On the other hand, the constituency of the college serves continues to impose certain conditions on the institutions operation, while calling for greater responsiveness on behalf of the institution in looking closer at the knowledge needs of society.

Yet, the nature of the constituency of a college and the extent to which that constituency is also the provider of resources has increased in importance in determining the mission of the college. Entitled resources made available to higher education through government and other official channels are being reallocated, making research grants a more important resource. The threat of reallocated resources has led colleges to be more accountable and to restructure — to do more with less, or to decide what has to go and who to serve.

The data made it clear that the reallocated resources made available to the college through official channels have had an impact on how faculty conduct business. Many respondents spoke about scarce resources, some relating resources to a sort of no-win situation, both at the department and college level. Others focused on how to reorganize the college's activities to gain resources for the engagement initiative.

In order to be real, engagement issues need to be funded from reallocation of current resources. I believe that the number one resource for engagement will come from our HUMAN RESOURCE. Our best frontal attack would be to make engagement "job one" within the college then allocate the appropriate financial resources to activate the essential human resource. (Associate Professor)

It's a catch 22...we need constituent support to get the resources to be more engaged...but in order to get that support we already need to be engaged...and we aren't. So without cutting something major out and replacing it with an orientation to engagement we don't have the resources to do it right. (Associate Professor)

Producing the right outcomes with palpable results will require using all resources efficiently and making sure everyone is working toward the same goal. If you ask for the right things, this will take care of itself. All it requires is leadership from top to bottom. (Associate Professor)

Departments are afraid to place value on engagement to the point that faculty and staff will devote resources to it. Again, it goes back to the reward system. Faculty know how to translate expert knowledge into something the public can use, but the rewards to do so are not there. Colleges and the university have to demonstrate they will reward engagement before faculty will take a chance. (Professor)

The issue of funding is changing the way colleges think about their missions. One respondent considered that for the way we seek out funds, contending that the financial situation faculty face today constitutes a wake-up call for college to ask the question, Why are we here?, and in answering that question to establish goals and procedures for meeting them to accompany the reward system adjustments that will need to be made.

A reward system based on criteria other than grantsmanship is needed. As long as highest dollar brought into the university receives the highest pay raises, awards, and recognitions, individuals will pursue funding where they can obtain it regardless of the applicability to major college stakeholders. Direction of the college is now determined by funding sources. Work floats to the mainstream of funding resulting in important work in areas without major funding to go undone. If you can tell me the focus of future funding, I can tell you the focus of work within the college regardless of what plans our stakeholders say. He who has the gold makes the rules. (Associate Professor)

The effect of the threat of dwindling resources is twofold. First, as one respondent stated, it has provided a need to be more accountable. That is, faculty need to prove that society is being served efficiently and effectively.

To become an engaged institution, we first have to understand our stakeholder needs. To often our faculty and institution is too far disconnected from societal needs. For example, the mundane, production questions and problems at the producer and 'local community partner' level are sometimes addressed by Extension staff and a few 'applied research-oriented' campus based faculty. However, most of the campus-based research faculty is so far into their "basic" and "publishable" research areas that they often cannot communicate their research and its worth to a producer client. This lack of accountability to local

needs is most likely in response to the review process in place (publish or perish).
(Assistant Professor)

Data also revealed the need to restructure, so that there is a better match between performance and the reward system. Although not easily changed, concrete examples of how important the reward system is to the process of building and maintaining institutional engagement was provided by the following respondents.

The reward system needs to be put in line with strategic plans and strategic plans need to be aligned with stakeholder needs. One could argue that rewards are in line with strategic plans and strategic plans are in line with current funding sources. Problems should be defined and then funds sought to solve the problem, instead of funding being found, and problems defined to acquire the funds.
(Professor)

Our department is reasonably well-linked with some agencies but poorly partnered with private industry. Both are important but the degree to which they are important will vary by the department. I believe that some departments are, in fact, too closely linked with some industries, causing their research agenda to be slanted toward those of their partners. While we must certainly respond to the needs of our constituents, we must not lose sight of the need to continue to answer more basic research questions that lead to practical insights down the road. I think we also need to be more interdisciplinary in our approaches. This will allow us to tap into each other's strengths across disciplines and create new, maybe better, solutions to problems than when we work in isolation. There must also be created recognition and institutional advancement for those that engage in interdisciplinary projects (teaching, research, or Extension). The reward system for such efforts simply don't exist now. (Associate Professor)

The internal stakeholders, ever more knowledgeable and needy, is gaining greater voice in the direction a college or university takes. Thus, accountability and the reward system becomes immediate, if the engagement initiative is to move forward as called for by the Kellogg Commission (NASULGC, 1999a).

Criterion of Neutrality

Since the beginning of the land-grant institution, when government made resources available in response to societal needs, the institution expanded to satisfy both foreseeable and unforeseeable needs. Now that continuing government reallocations have become a reality, some means of determining societies needs have priority and is essential. A pivotal test case of what a college can be expected to do within society is the question of institution purpose.

A university must be above the day-to-day fray of public choice issues while at the same time being recognized for its ability to provide meaningful insight into the future. In other words, I accept the concept that a university is an economic and social engine that promotes societal development and equality but if we're dealing with today's issues we're not really a university. We're simply another social

agency, economic bureau, etc. We need to be the people who prepare society for tomorrow's issues. All of this says, we need to be a recognized neutral albeit knowledgeable and valuable party. (Professor)

If the role of institutional engagement is to be the availability of an institution to its constituency, then the LGCA will be evaluated against the criterion of how well it aids a broad spectrum of constituency groups. These respondents spoke to the need for constituency input in the following manner.

Needs assessments, community round tables, listening to others than those who are presently in power. Many within the college never meet regularly with stakeholders outside the institution; it might be beneficial to require our academics to meet with potential stakeholders (although this would probably fail because faculty would be against it). (Staff Member)

The targeted population should be the primary partner, then the department should search for others interested in meeting the same need and work together to provide the service. Efforts should be made to see how the primary partner can meet needs of the department. (Assistant Professor)

A truly representative group of constituents should meet with faculty, staff and administration. Currently there is input to the administration but not to faculty and staff. (Associate Professor)

Finding ways to gain constituency input was a continued theme that ran throughout this study. Yet, if the college is envisioned as a center of intellect biased by funds, as the following respondent suggest, the neutrality of the institution may be called into question and possibly affect how knowledge is developed and perceived.

I doubt we are neutral now. Big money has biased us, neutrality is important to keep interest by broad constituencies and not just special interest groups. (Professor)

I'm concerned about the growing number of alliances between our college and private companies. I understand the motivation to get sponsorship and funding from private companies, but I worry about the potential for inappropriate influence on students or research outcomes. (Associate Professor)

Neutrality is essential. Our role in society must be one of an honest broker of information. If we are perceived as being beholden to any special interests we will lose credibility. Already too many in our state believe that our university is heavily influenced by industrial money, and that the College of Agriculture cares only for large agribusiness concerns. (Professor)

Criterion of Clarification

Finally, as these respondents contend, if institutional engagement is to become one of the most essential missions of the college, then greater clarification is needed.

The question that I think really needs to be asked is, What is engagement? I think there is a disconnect among faculty and administration regarding engagement. I've heard about the new strategic plan regarding engagement, but don't really know what that means, and it has had no effect on my job as a faculty member. We faculty continue to research and teach, while administrators worry about things like engagement. (Associate Professor)

No one has taken the time to explain what engagement is, other than serving clientele, which is what we do now. I have no idea what the practical implication or definition of engagement is, and the impact it has on my position. (Associate Professor)

As these statements highlight, because institutional engagement is a complex situation, and as the LGCA begins to be recognized as equally complex, clarification is essential. It appears that a crucial step may be to establish opportunities for internal agents to engage in critical reflection of engagement in their programs, departments and the college. Ultimately, what may nurture the unfolding of institutional engagement will be serious, active experimentation where organizational actors wrestle with crucial strategic and operational issues. Several respondents explained why dialogue and clarification is so important:

First the question assumes that my department has some sort of structure... maybe so, maybe no. I honestly believe that among the first steps to an engagement agenda is in getting the DEO on board. I do not feel this is the case in my department. This being the case, in my department the key to an internal structural embrace would be to have a STRONG endorsement from the Dean... thereby causing the DEO to fall in line. The DEO would need to allow ample time to the faculty to dialogue and reach an agreement on what engagement will look like departmentally. (Professor)

'Engagement' needs to be clearly explained. At present many faculty perceive it simply as the latest buzzword and do not have a clear understanding of what it means. (Associate Professor)

These respondents confirm that many structural and power issues must be considered prior to moving the engagement agenda forward within the LGCA.

My impression is that as in most large organizations, top administration is not very close to the faculty ranks. Usually, whether or not such problems are remedied depends on personality's more than organizational structure. But structure should be designed to help, of course. (Associate Professor)

The administration needs to demonstrate by example a sincere willingness to respond to the needs and concerns of faculty regarding institutional engagement. If structural changes are not made to reward faculty for becoming engaged, then things will stay the same and gaps will continue to be created between social needs and institutional activities. (Associate Professor)

The administration could more actively engage with our constituencies and set up opportunities for departments/faculty to talk with relevant groups and individuals to discuss what our agenda ought to be. (Assistant Professor)

Questions these findings raised are, “Where does the onus for institutional engagement lie?” and “What is the relationship between the role administration plays and the role faculty plays in advancing institutional engagement?”

Conclusions

Because of the design used in this study, the results can be generalized to only the participants involved. Moreover, the evidence provided should not lead to the conclusion that certain factors are more important in stimulating academic reform than others, for it seems clear that some are particularly significant. One basic fact is simply the possibility of benefit or reward. University, college, departmental, or even program change is unlikely unless the change appears to lead to greater reward than does the present paradigm. The findings of this study conclude that there is little reason for the college to build institutional engagement programs, activities or initiatives unless the reward system changes to promote the process of building and maintaining engaged institutions. Without potential reward, in brief, change is unlikely.

A second finding is individual influence. It seems clear that, to bring about change in the college, as in other organizations, advocacy is imperative to overcome innate institutional inertia. Call it inspiration, leadership, persuasion, or politicking; without it change is unlikely. The advocate not only welds a unity of interest out of the diverse interests of members; they can point to the possible rewards of change — convincing members and patrons of unmet challenges, new opportunities, and desirable responsibilities. All the evidence from history, as well as from the findings of this study provide evidence that institutional change tends to be highest within departments and programs where the most influential members of the institution are seen as forces for change rather than for stability.

Third, the structure of the institution has an effect on the process of change through its openness to influence. Thus the very fact of engagement needs to lead not simply to requiring new responsibilities of faculty, staff and administrators, but to the reform of responsibilities to encompass the engagement initiative into current research, teaching and outreach functions. Likewise, structural changes in the promotion and tenure system appear to be needed prior to advance the engagement initiative. Faculty, need to be rewarded for being engaged, rather than punished for not performing the traditional research and publishing requirements.

Perhaps the most important finding is the concern about the origins of the factors that are influential in building and maintaining institutional engagement. Sources of educational change are primarily internal, from within the college itself — such as the spontaneous innovations of creative professors and imaginative administrations. Or are they external to the institution? — imposed, of necessity, on reluctant academics by outside forces and groups? This question not only stirs antagonistic arguments but also raises major issues of university governance: issues of academic freedom, faculty prerogatives, professional autonomy, policy determination, and institutional accountability. It involves the problem of the best social policy regarding higher education and its control.

As the data from this study revealed, people's attitudes are influenced by their own position. Professors, daily involved in their own efforts at improvement, naturally tend to see themselves and their colleagues as the initiators of change, just as administrators, actively working on some of the same problems, more often see themselves as the key sources of impetus. If state legislators or the members of governing boards or external agents were asked about the sources of change, their reactions would probably display the same tendency. Thus to consider this issue as objectively as possible, it is necessary to examine it beyond one's own parochial perspective.

Implications for Agricultural Education

Findings of this study highlights three forms of active participation that an agricultural education department can assist with advancing the engagement initiative within the LGCA. The first refers to the direct involvement of internal stakeholders in activities closely associated with information gaining opportunities related to the discrepancy and efficacy cues of institutional engagement. In the LGCA, this could translate to internal stakeholder participative roles in a range of situations, including working parties, joint consultative committees, quality assurance teams, institutional engagement learning communities, specific project teams, or internal stakeholder representation on specific industry councils or civic boards. The second form of active participation described that an agricultural education department can provide is leadership that relates to vicarious learning. Where the department can suggest opportunities for internal stakeholders to observe others utilizing new and innovative techniques and engagement practices in which could in turn enhance the observer's confidence (and readiness) to attempt and adopt the technique or practice. The final form of active participation relates to enactive mastery that provides opportunity for internal stakeholder involvement and success in small incremental steps towards a larger desired change for advancing the engagement initiative. These smaller success opportunities for internal stakeholders can assist in generating efficacy towards the larger desired change and this would link closely to the participative roles mentioned in direct participation.

Institutional engagement is not conducted in isolation from teaching and research. Effective practice of engagement should draw on institutional academic strengths, and depend on integration with the institution's goals for teaching, learning and research. Institutional engagement requires investments in infrastructure, faculty development and organizational change. Therefore, engagement requires strategic planning to ensure success and sustainability. Every department and program within the college needs to make its own systematic decisions about the degree to which institutional engagement is appropriate and relevant to their department mission and strategic directions, as well as the college's mission and strategic plans.

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Credit is given to the authors for investigating a current topic of critical importance. Given the economic condition of the nation, and growing social demands on increasingly scarce resources, the future configuration of land grant universities is occurring through financial crisis management. In some instances, change is being orchestrated by financial cut-backs based upon loss of resources solely in proportion to receipt of state support. A political posture of minimizing stakeholder loss is choreographed as justification while operating on an illusive mission statement that is more institutional centered than stakeholder based.

Unfortunately, several of the respondent quotations offered in this report are reflective of current conditions found in land grant universities. Those being: only listening to organized commodity groups serving a rather narrow scope of agricultural interests; incentives and rewards that most matter to career-minded faculty.... have little to nothing to do with public and social goals in practice; direction of the college is now determined by funding sources; and campus-based research faculty is so far into their “basic” and “publishable” research areas they cannot communicate their research and its worth to a producer.

As the authors report, respondents in this research recommend that in order to advance the engagement initiative we should: hire outstanding scholars with broad interests and technical abilities in order to address ever-changing problems and issues; listen to a broader agricultural and natural resource constituency base (including non-farm stakeholders) and truly seek their input; maintain a role that is important and unique through providing objective science; use resources efficiently and have everyone working toward the same goal; increase our interdisciplinary approach to issues; prepare society for tomorrow’s issues; and find authentic ways of gaining constituency input.

In specific regard to this study, it would have been helpful had the Kellogg criterion for engagement been clearly stated, and a distinction between service and outreach compared to engagement documented. An interesting arena for further investigation would be the university environment as mentioned in the theoretical framework. The interaction of the political, social, economic, technological, and educational ecosystem, both internal and external to universities is currently driving change for better or worse. Interfacing those forces with the conclusions of this study could prove interesting. Individual reward structure was a recurring theme throughout this paper. The insinuation from those citations was strictly self concept related. I believe attention to the work done by Barbuto and Scholl (1999) on motivation may be beneficial to enlarge this discussion on reward structure.