The University Next Door: Developing a Centralized Unit that Strategically Cultivates Community Engagement at Urban Universities

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Abstract
This presentation is from the Coalition for Urban and Metropolitan Universities Conference in Omaha, Nebraska on October 13, 2015.

Keywords
university, central units, community engagement, urban university, VCU, Virginia Commonwealth University, Division of Community Engagement, community engagement, civic engagement, central, infrastructure

Disciplines
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The University Next Door: Developing a Centralized Unit that Strategically Cultivates Community Engagement at Urban Universities

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Coalition for Urban and Metropolitan Universities Conference, Omaha Nebraska, October 13, 2015
We are a premier urban, public research university focused on academic success.

Established in 1838

Located in Richmond, Virginia

More than 171,000 alumni worldwide
About Richmond

» Virginia’s capital city
» Home to six Fortune 500 companies
» Growing innovation ecosystem
» Thriving arts community
The VCU population

» 31,288 students
» 100 countries represented in student population
» 11,388 employees
» 2,170 full-time instructional faculty
Academic programs

13 schools and one college

222 degree and certificate programs

64 baccalaureate degree programs
74 master's degree programs
40 doctoral degree programs
3 first-professional degree programs
41 post-baccalaureate and post-master's certificate programs
Challenges when you are a large, decentralized campus that resides in the heart of the city.
Units are disconnected and moving in different directions
“Force to be reckoned with”

Well, Thompson don’t mention the 5000 pound gorilla, so why should you?
Funders are pushing universities to get more engaged in the community.
Theme I
Become a leader among national research universities in providing all students with high-quality learning/living experiences focused on inquiry, discovery and innovation in a global environment.

Theme II
Attain distinction as a fully integrated urban, public research university through contributions in human health, research, scholarship and creative expression that advance knowledge and enhance the quality of life.

Theme III
Become a national model for community engagement and regional impact.
How to Navigate?

- Create central office that reports to Provost
- Establish administrator who sits with leadership
- Create definitions for Community Engagement
- Hire professional staff with credentials and experience
- Ensure staff are at the table for major initiatives – on campus and in community
- Coffee
Evolution of DCE

- Service-learning – support from Learn and Serve
- Carver neighborhood partnership – support from HUD +
- AmeriCorps – support from CNCS
- Community Solutions - duPont Fund
- Community Engaged Research – VCU strategic priority
- ASPIRE – first Living Learning program, VCU retention priority
• **Mission** – To mobilize university-community partnerships that generate innovative solutions to societal challenges and prepare the engaged citizens of tomorrow.

• **Vision** – VCU is a community of engaged citizens, working together, changing lives.

• **Structure/Organization** –
  • Housed within the academic affairs arm of the university, in the Provost’s Office.
  • Led by a vice provost who reports directly to the university provost.
  • Employs 24 full-time staff members who are experts in community engagement.
  • Organized into program areas that work to improve both the quality and quantity of community-engaged research, community-engaged teaching/learning, and community-engaged service/outreach.
EXPOSURE
Strategies designed to introduce engagement concepts to individuals who are primarily involved in traditional research, teaching and service practices

EXPERIENCE
Strategies designed to support individuals and collaborations that are in the early stages of university-community partnership work

EXPERT
Strategies designed to deepen the work of individuals and collaborations that are experienced in university-community partnership work
VCU DIVISION OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

STRATEGIC VALUES FOR VCU

• Serves as the **point of contact** for external and internal stakeholders
• **Represents** the **university** in the community
• **Represents community engagement** perspective within university leadership
• Helps university **build capacity** to work with the community
  • Provides **professional development** opportunities for faculty and staff
• **Ensures integrity** of community-engaged scholarship
  • **Incubates** best practice community engagement models
• **Tracks higher education trends**, locally and nationally
• Bridges disciplines to **advance interdisciplinary partnerships**
Building Internal Capacity

Building Capacity of Faculty, Staff and Students

**Community Engagement Institute:**
- Held annually
- Provides faculty, staff, students, and community partners the opportunity to build a basic understanding of community engagement
- Focus on service-learning and community-engaged research

**Faculty Mentoring Program:**
- Provides guidance and support to faculty members developing or teaching new service-learning courses
- Pairs faculty mentees with experienced service-learning instructors as mentors

**Faculty Fellow Program:**
- Faculty serve for up to two years
- Receive stipend of up to $4,200
- Mentored in development of service-learning scholarship
- Serve in campus leadership roles to promote service-learning

**Council for Community Engagement Grants:**
- One year seed grants
- Up to $20,000
- Support interdisciplinary projects that enhance and increase engagement with community and contribute to research and teaching within units.

**Online Orientation Videos:**
- Prepare students for service in the community

**Faculty Learning Communities:**
- Cross-disciplinary groups of 6-10 faculty
- Engage in active, collaborative and self-guided explorations of identified topics

**VCU Division of Community Engagement Website:**
community.vcu.edu

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**Office of the Provost**
Division of Community Engagement

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**Virginia Commonwealth University**
Council for Community Engagement (CCE)
consists of representatives from all academic and major support units

- builds a network across VCU units
- receives and disseminates information and resources that promotes and supports community engagement
- gathers information from the community on critical needs and opportunities
- recognizes accomplishments of university-community partnerships
- assists in the coordination of events designed to engage the VCU community with community partners to address community-identified needs

Grants and Gifts Committee
- administers funds to encourage university engagement with community-identified needs
- oversees mini-grant program with a fund of up to $100,000

Awards and Recognition Committee
- brings attention to the community engagement activities of VCU faculty, staff and students
- oversees annual awards for outstanding university-community partnerships

Community Connections Committee
- creates bridge between
- oversees service opportunities for VCU employees and promotes community service leave

Senior Vice President for Health Sciences
Associate Vice President for Health Sciences
Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs
Vice Provost for Community Engagement
Future Challenges and Opportunities

- Tracking and measuring impact
- Focusing our efforts
- Advancing community-engaged scholarship
TEACHING AND LEARNING

ASPiRE

VCU ASPIRE is a living-learning community that aims to enrich and deepen students’ understanding of their capacity to create positive change in communities.

LEARN MORE

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Service Opportunities

Community service events and opportunities.

VIEW

Funding Resources

Funding to support community engagement activities.

LEARN MORE

Community Engagement Cafe

Discuss readings and videos related to community engagement.