Community Engagement Research Academy

**Measuring and Understanding Impact**

*Engagement for Excellence:* Portland State University is internationally recognized as an engagement for excellence leader in “Letting Knowledge Serve”. Over three decades of research-evidence indicates that well-structured community engagement leads to excellence in academic achievement, scholarly productivity, and community enhancement.

Hundreds of journal articles, books, and seminal research demonstrate unequivocally that Community Engagement increases:

- **Student Retention, Learning, and Graduation:** students stay in school, learn more academic content, increase critical thinking skills, and graduate at higher rates. Moreover, students from first generation and under-represented populations demonstrate exponentially positive increases on each of these indicators.

- **Faculty Breadth and Depth of Scholarship:** faculty conduct disciplinary and multi-disciplinary research including the scholarship of teaching.

- **Community Enhancement:** reciprocity of interests and efforts with businesses, government, and the non-profit sectors are realized in community enhancement across educational, economic, and environmental outcomes.

- **University Mission:** community engagement provides a unifying vision and action agenda for PSU purposes, processes, policies, and programs.

Community Engagement has a definitive and quantifiable value on multiple dimensions which include pedagogy, scholarship, community, and organization. *Engagement for Excellence* is the educational process and product of capacity building of individuals, communities, and organizations.

Engagement for Excellence research is not fully complete nor comprehensive. There are critical details, nuances, subtleties, and differentiations to the processes and products of engagement for excellence. As such, PSU will work to sustain its leadership in investigating, analyzing, comparing, deconstructing, and co-constructing community engagement as a 21st pedagogical model and scholarly approach for creating inclusive, equitable, and thriving colleges and communities.

**Community Engagement and PSU’s Strategic Plan**

Portland State University is now working on implementing its Five Year Strategic Plan for 2016-2020. In March 2017, the PSU Partnership Council issued an implementation action plan for Goal #3 of the PSU Strategic Plan. Goal #3 calls for extending our leadership in community engagement. The Council identified six initiatives that build upon our current engagement work:

1. Expanding community-based learning opportunities and supporting life-long community engagement
2. Creating an academically supported internship program
3. Creating and disseminating knowledge about engagement practice and impact
4. Telling our story and connecting to our partners
5. Pursuing strategic partnerships as an Anchor Institution
6. Systems solutions to advancing community partnerships

Central to all of these efforts will be the third initiative, to create and disseminate knowledge about engagement practice and impact.

Launching the Community Engagement Research Academy (CERA)

Portland State University is creating the Community Engagement Research Academy (CERA) as a home, mostly virtual, for the intellectual core of our community engagement work and to create and share research about engagement practice and impact. CERA will build upon the long-standing scholarship of engagement activity at PSU and advance the field of university-community engagement and partnership. PSU’s deep experience in engagement and partnership can be further developed and explored to inform the next generation of work in this arena.

CERA’s two-fold mission is to:

1. Identify evidence-based high impact and promising practices related to community engagement; and

2. Create a community of scholars concerned with how community engagement is most effectively delivered, assessed, and scaled for the better of the colleges and universities (students, faculty and staff), community partners, and local, national, and international communities.

Building a Community of Scholars

The Community Engagement Research Academy will undertake efforts to bring together faculty, staff and students on campus with an interest in assessing the impact of university-community engagement. Those who wish to regularly participate in CERA will be designated as Academy Scholars. Efforts to build this community of scholars will concentrate on strategies where people can describe their relevant research activities and findings in colloquia, engage in electronic conversations and reports on the Engagement Portal, and participate in a small grants program to stimulate research on engagement impact. The Academy will also undertake strategic action to disseminate research findings through multiple formats as well as to convene occasional research conferences. Academy Scholars and their scholarship will be featured on the Engagement Portal.

Leadership Council

The work of the Community Engagement Research Academy will be guided by a Leadership Council composed of 8-10 faculty and staff with interests in the scholarship of engagement. Members will serve for staggered two-year terms. The Dean of the College of Urban and Public Affairs shall convene the Council at its inception. Current members of the Leadership Council include: Amy Spring, Lisa Bases, Christine Cress, Sherril Gelmon, Kevin Kecskes, Kathi Ketcheson, Sheila Martin, Sally Mudiamu, Stephen Percy, and Judith Ramaley.