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what is outreach?

"Outreach" refers to the function of applying academic expertise to the direct benefit of external audiences in support of university and unit missions. A faculty endeavor may be regarded as outreach scholarship for purposes of tenure and promotion if all the following conditions are met: 1) there is a substantive link with significant human needs and societal problems, issues or concerns; 2) there is a direct application of knowledge to significant human needs and societal problems, issues or concerns; 3) there is utilization of the faculty member's academic and professional expertise; 4) the ultimate purpose is for the public or common good; 5) new knowledge is generated for the discipline and/or the audience or clientele; and 6) there is a clear link/relationship between the program/activities and an appropriate academic unit's mission.

- Auburn University Faculty Handbook, Chapter 3, Section 8C
In the last issue of Perspectives, we looked at how the concept of outreach is evolving nationally. Auburn University is an important part of this movement. In this issue we will focus on activities at Auburn in terms of both policy changes and the outreach experiences of faculty and staff.

The national dialogue on outreach is rich and active, fueled by publications such as Ernest Boyer’s *Scholarship Reconsidered* and the *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*, conferences sponsored by organizations like the American Association for Higher Education and the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges, and even federal grant programs such as those administered by the Office of University Partnerships in the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Increasingly, outreach is seen as being broader than extension and different from service. The term “engagement” is often used to imply a continuing relationship between the academy and external audiences in which each side brings unique assets to work toward common goals.

Meanwhile, Auburn University has made great progress in redefining and institutionalizing outreach. Since the last issue of Perspectives, the Auburn University Senate and the Board of Trustees unanimously approved a new definition of outreach (see facing page) and procedures for reporting and assessing outreach scholarship in the tenure and promotion process. These are now part of the Faculty Handbook. It was, if you will pardon the pun, a defining event. Rather than defining outreach by means of specific examples (continuing education, extension, etc.) the new statement focuses on the intent and outcomes of the scholarly activity – applying academic expertise to benefit of external audiences in support of common goals.

"Defining outreach does not restrict the form of scholarly product. It does establish a means of assessing outreach scholarship so that it can be counted in the tenure and promotion process."

- assistant vice president for University Outreach and professor of Political Science

robert montjoy
university and unit missions. The who, what, when and where are left to the faculty member.

A faculty member engaged in outreach is, ideally, drawing upon the same discipline-based knowledge that he or she uses in classroom teaching or in theory-driven research. Indeed, most outreach does involve some form of instruction and/or research. And the outreach experience should contribute to a faculty member’s knowledge as well, thereby strengthening her or his instruction and research.

Defining outreach does not restrict the form of scholarly product. It does establish a means of assessing outreach scholarship so that it can be counted in the tenure and promotion process. The policy does not change the weight assigned to outreach by the department or discipline, but provides a method for documenting and assessing quality in outreach.

The Faculty Handbook definition of outreach was the product of not only the national discussion in the academy, but a decade-long effort by Auburn’s finest practitioners and scholars. In all, more than 40 faculty campus wide addressed outreach strategic planning, assessment and scholarship in committees led by Maury Matthews, John Heilman, Wayne Flynt and Charles Hendrix. During that time, Auburn hosted a series of symposia on outreach scholarship, published two strategic reports and a monograph and sent faculty to present at two major national conferences on outreach engagement. Indeed, Auburn can claim a hardy contribution to the concept of “scholarship of application” as Boyer put it.

Since the adoption of the outreach definition, the university has initiated its use in tenure and promotion reviews. To date, I have visited almost every department on campus presenting a workshop on planning and reporting outreach scholarship for tenure and promotion. I have been impressed with the great variety of outreach activities by Auburn faculty and their common enthusiasm for what they do. In one respect the faculty motivation parallels that for community service, the altruistic instinct to do good. The distinction between service and outreach, however, comes from the latter’s reliance on academic expertise, and herein lies a second motivation. People wish to test their knowledge in complex, “real world,” situations, to learn what works, and to increase their own understanding in the process.

In this issue of Perspectives, we continue our discussion with Auburn faculty on the role of outreach in their scholarship. Keenan Grenell, Ted Becker, Bill Deutsch, and Chris Rodger represent how varied outreach scholarship can be among faculty at Auburn. Fran Kochan offers a leadership perspective as dean. Jay Lamar and Barbara Struempler both represent the perspectives of those with primary appointments in outreach; Barb offers an added perspective as past chair of the Faculty Senate that adopted the new definition of outreach. To each, we thank you for your participation.
When traveling Alabama Jay Lamar doesn't worry about being stranded. “I used to think if I had a flat tire almost anywhere, I would know somebody who could help me,” says Lamar, associate director of AU’s Center for the Arts & Humanities, outreach office of the College of Liberal Arts.

“We do programs around the state in history, literature and the arts,” she says, adding, “If there’s a county we haven’t been in, I don’t know it. We do a lot of work in public libraries, schools, communities, local history groups, different organizations in the state.”

The center is closely allied with the Alabama Writers’ Forum, the Alabama Council on the Arts and the Alabama Humanities Foundation.

“I think one of the most important things that we do is bringing people together, and they discuss their history and heritage and have a chance to talk and learn,” says Lamar, who has been with the center since 1988.

Most programs are in smaller communities.

“They don’t have the same opportunities as metropolitan areas or college towns,” says Lamar. “If you bring in a scholar who’s an expert on Steinbeck or Faulkner or World War II, then people come because they just love to have that opportunity.

“I think that in Alabama, overall, there’s kind of a growing trend toward becoming more interested in education and culture,” says Lamar, who adds that the center’s programs have covered pre-European Native American history through 20th century politics and history.

When Lamar first came to the center, she called communities and “begged” them to host programs.

“Now people call us, and they have ideas, they want consultations, they have things they are trying to do,” she says, adding that helping communities develop their own programs is one of the center’s original goals.

Some of the center’s programs and designations include: The Alabama Center for the Book; Alabama Voices; Deep South Regional Humanities Center; Draughon Seminars; Helping Schools Through the Arts and Humanities; and the Alabama Prison Arts Initiative.

“I think one of the most important things that we do is bringing people together, and they discuss their history and heritage and have a chance to talk and learn.”

- associate director, Center for the Arts & Humanities

jay lamar
Alabama has 75,000 miles of streams – enough to wrap around the earth three times. Eight percent of all of the water in the continental United States goes through Alabama.

“Alabama’s got more water than virtually anywhere else,” says William Deutsch, research fellow and program director for Alabama Water Watch (AWW), headquartered in AU’s International Center for Aquaculture and Aquatic Environments.

AWW, started 11 years ago and initially funded by the Environmental Protection Agency and the Alabama Department of Environmental Management, is a program dedicated to developing citizen volunteer monitoring of the state’s lakes, streams and coasts. More than 4,000 citizens have been trained by AWW, which currently includes 75 citizen groups.

“Auburn Fisheries has a 60-year tradition of international work,” says Deutsch, who has been to the Philippines 25 times in 10 years. He has also helped programs in Equador, Thailand and Brazil and will be going “back to China” this year. He also speaks to 50 to 70 groups each year.

“Many of the low-tech, simple testing methods we’ve developed here at Auburn are relevant and adaptable for the setting in a developing country,” he says.

“The goal of water watch groups is to assess their water to see what standard it meets and then, hopefully, work toward remediation and fixing problems so that it could one day be upgraded.”

From his “long list” of benefits from his work, Deutsch says, “I think the most rewarding part would be when we see the light bulb go on in these training workshops, ... a citizen group that’s really come alive and starts to realize that they have the power to collect the information they need to change their lives.”

- Research Fellow, Fisheries and Allied Aquacultures and program director for Alabama Water Watch (AWW) William Deutsch
While many Alabamians talk about constitutional reform, Ted Becker, AU Alumni Professor of political science, did something about it.

In 2002, Becker initiated a simulated constitutional convention (SimConCon), an action experiment in democratic learning. It involved approximately 30 undergraduate and graduate students and 20 expert witnesses, with hearings, plenary sessions and lots of information, opinion and heated deliberation via electronic information and communications technologies, giving citizens the opportunity to participate.

“I am using Auburn University as a base of outreach to the world to inform, teach, advise and coordinate those who are interested in using new information and communications technologies to assist in the development of democracy worldwide,” says Becker.

Since 1995, Becker’s web site http://frontpage.auburn.edu/tann/ has logged more than 40,000 visitors from 95 nations. It is rated in the top five percent of all web sites, the top teledemocracy web site by Yahoo, Lycos and Ask Jeeves and is one of USA Today’s Hot sites.

“I’ve advised governments, centers, institutes, agencies and individuals on various kinds of research proposals via this web site,” says Becker. There’s no charge for the service, “But I’d say this is a valuable kind of outreach for any university to do.”

Of the SimConCon, Becker says, “I think the students did a great job in coming up with a new constitution for the state . . . Something I personally think would be a boon for the future of Alabama. I learned a lot. The students learned a lot. And the fruits are there for all to see,” (http://frontpage.auburn.edu/simconcon/main.asp).

“Mixing teaching, research and outreach is by far the best teaching I do,” says Becker. “The students love it. The community benefits. And I learn a lot. What could be better?”

“Mixing teaching, research and outreach is by far the best teaching I do.”

- AU Alumni Professor of Political Science

 ted becker
In 1994 Keenan Grenell, associate professor of political science, "scribbled on a yellow legal pad the importance of a conference" focusing on African-American entrepreneurship. "I had no way of knowing the . . . conference would grow to where it is right now."


Grenell, now interim assistant provost for AU’s Office of Diversity and Multicultural Affairs, hoped to attract African-Americans from the United States, Africa, the Caribbean and South America to the summit in South Africa.

Although it will take decades to rectify the economic results of apartheid, "What I've found is some of the exact same problems that blacks in South Africa face (capital, staffing and competition) . . . are the ones I find here with blacks in America and especially in Alabama."

"However, . . . their challenge is a little greater because they don't have the type of infrastructure that can sustain black entrepreneurship," says Grenell, adding that there is a shortage of black attorneys, risk insurers, financial managers and accountants.

Grenell, also head of the Master’s of Public Administration Program, teaches continuing education courses for elections officials through AU's partnership with The Election Center in Houston, Texas.

"I've got students responsible for the management of elections in Miami and L.A.," he says.

But because of the summit, Grenell now has international contacts in corporate and governmental circles, and summit papers have been published in the Entrepreneurship Policy Journal.

And for Grenell, outreach and scholarship are not mutually exclusive.

"Just because you engage in outreach doesn't stop you from writing or publishing," he says. "What you do is chronicle your activity. There are journals that want that, books that can be developed from that."
For Barbara Struempler, professor of nutrition and food science and nutritionist with the Alabama Cooperative Extension System, outreach is a two-way street.

“It’s important to take research-based information . . . out to the people with the philosophy that by educating them, they can improve the quality of their life.

“And the turn around of that is when they have problems, you bring those problems back to a research-based facility which can address those issues, so you can build on that knowledge,” says Struempler.

For 19 years Struempler has been doing exactly that.

“Much of it has been hands on, so it’s a kind of field work,” says Struempler, adding that typical extension programs involve community intervention. This issue-based programming addresses problems not “unique solely to Alabama.”

Working in “real-life situations” is quite different from teaching in a classroom, says Struempler.

“Our clientele are there because they need us. They have a problem. They’re not required to attend,” she says.

“So when you have learners and educators like that, I think there is an automatic engagement. You work together better. It’s more fun to teach, and it’s a real-life situation,” says Struempler, adding, “I find consumer education, usually with adults, so rewarding compared to teaching in a classroom.”

Struempler also chaired the AU Faculty Senate in 2002. During that time, the senate adopted an official definition of outreach and guidelines to reward outreach activity.

While acknowledging that outreach is “probably hard to evaluate,” adopting a definition of outreach is the first step.

“We need the definition so people can say that they do outreach and be rewarded for those activities, and they know how to write it up so someone can evaluate what they are doing.”

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barbara struempler
For the past three summers, Chris Rodger, a professor of mathematics in AU’s College of Sciences and Mathematics, has conducted math workshops for approximately 80 of Alabama’s K-8 teachers.

And except for sessions in Auburn and Montgomery, most of Rodger’s efforts have been in West Alabama’s Black Belt. Working with a program originated at Rutgers University, Rodger has conducted workshops in Dallas (Selma) and Lowndes counties for teachers from those counties as well as from Hale, Marion and Perry counties.

“The university should not be an island,” says Rodger. “When you step . . . outside of Auburn-Opelika, you see something that we should be doing something about, and we have the expertise to do it.”

But outreach, he says, is sometimes a balancing act.

“I do think that we should give teachers the chance to take these tools and present them to their children so that they have the opportunity to decide whether to use them or not,” he says. “And that’s the problem. I think that’s where we have to make sure that the children have the opportunity to choose which way they want to go without sort of forcing the change of life on other people.”

Scholarship, says Rodger, is vital during the preparation stage.

“You have to know the work extremely well to see what the main ideas are, and to find the ideas that you can present in a useful, comprehensive, understandable way to the people who need them,” Rodger says.

But the work is worth it to Rodger.

“They are gaining skills that they would otherwise not have,” he says. “One of them came with very poor skills and came back with such excitement because she had been given the confidence to let her children explore mathematics.

“It’s just so encouraging when you spend the time doing this outreach.”

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- professor of mathematics in Auburn University's College of Sciences and Mathematics

chris rodger
Fran Kochan, interim dean of AU’s College of Education, has been combining outreach, instruction and research since her teaching career began on a Pacific island.

As a new teacher, she explored ways to make reading programs relevant for students from a different culture. Collecting folklore from the community, she became involved in helping parents work with their children.

And while a principal at a Florida school, one of Kochan’s main goals was creating a family/school/community partnership.

"From those experiences," says Kochan, "I got, I think, a deep and passionate belief that the only way education can be successful is to have the community be a part of it."

After Kochan came to Auburn, David Wilson, associate provost and vice president for University Outreach, sponsored a panel of people from West Alabama, who outlined for Auburn University the problems faced by citizens in Alabama’s Black Belt region. AU had established a presence in the area in 1993 with the School of Architecture’s Rural Studio. AU Outreach then funded a number of faculty grants for improving conditions in West Alabama. Kochan was hooked.

"I was just so intrigued and thought, ‘We need to be out there. We need to be working with these people,’" says Kochan, who later became the director of the Truman Pierce Institute (TPI) — an agency which provides professional development for educators. In 1995, TPI spearheaded the effort to organize the West Alabama Learning Coalition (WALC).

The WALC, now directed by Cynthia Reed, partners Black Belt K-12 school systems with higher education. The institutes of higher education involved in the coalition include Auburn University, Tuskegee University, the University of South Alabama, the University of West

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- interim dean of AU’s College of Education

frances kochan
Alabama, Bevill State Community College, Reid State Technical College and Concordia College.

Although the initial educational partnership proved beneficial, says Kochan, the coalition is now focusing more on the entire community.

"The focus is on improving education, but also on creating leadership in the community that will look at how we can make the whole community better."

At a land-grant university such as Auburn, Kochan says, "I think the College of Education has a responsibility to be connected to the community. I think part of our goal and part of our role is to make sure that schools and communities are connected, and that we're connected to the field, because it's only by being out there and seeing the world as it is and the struggles that people have that we can be strong ourselves. It's a part of who we are as a college. It's definitely part of who I am as a professional."

Just as Kochan brings communities and the schools together, she also combines AU's three missions of instruction, research and outreach.

"It doesn't have to be separate, in fact, I don't think it should be. Almost all of my writing . . . and almost all of my work has been connected to my outreach," says Kochan.

Kochan says her outreach activities have "wonderfully" enhanced her teaching.

"It makes my teaching so alive, and it has always done that," she says. "And I think it makes me more credible."

"Students will often say or have said that they come out of my classes, and they are changed. And they think differently, and they can take what I'm talking about and apply it. So it makes my teaching richer because I can point to real examples, real-world things. I think it definitely enriches my teaching, always has enriched my teaching," says Kochan.

Outreach has also enhanced her research.

"My research looks at collaboration. I look at how people learn to collaborate. How are partnerships made? What are the struggles? What are the challenges? What facilitates this kind of work? So it's all a big piece of the pie," says Kochan.

"I think the best way to make this happen is to seriously look at your research agenda and the teaching that you have to do, and then combine it all with outreach, and it all works," she says. "And it's all richer and stronger."

But Kochan acknowledges that she might not be able to practice her style of outreach somewhere else.

"I think we have a wonderful support system for outreach in this college and university," she says. "And I appreciate the board of trustees and the (faculty) senate and everybody in developing the outreach scholarship and tenure program."

At a recent meeting of education deans, Kochan says, "I told them that Auburn University had an outreach scholarship track that you could use to get promoted and tenured. They could not believe that. And when I tell people this all over the country, they can not believe it. It's wonderful."

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As we see from the various perspectives in this booklet, outreach at Auburn is a dynamic process from which both community and university benefit. Not only does outreach push knowledge into the community to address problems, it serves as a conduit for information to return back to campus to stimulate more research and improve teaching methods.

Outreach also serves to engage the faculty directly in this cycle of learning. No longer is the university detached from the community it serves. The benefits here, too, are evident; the university can be more responsive, even proactive, in addressing community needs.

Just as the Faculty Handbook has redefined the role of outreach for professors, outreach is helping Auburn University redefine its role in the state of Alabama. Numerous initiatives are being launched in conjunction with state and local governments, other institutions and various stakeholders to address critical issues which face our state – education, economic development, constitutional reform, governmental excellence, recovery for the Black Belt, quality of life and more. Harnessing its own significant resources and influence, Auburn has moved the “ivory tower” to the trenches and front lines of the effort to improve Alabama.

Of course, Auburn has always had a statewide presence as a land-grant institution and as the state headquarters of the Cooperative Extension System. Yet, Auburn long defined its role in the community along disciplinary lines just as the university defined itself academically along the disciplines. Many individual programs of the university were conducted across the state separately from one another. Today, the university increasingly marshals interdisciplinary resources addressing needs holistically. More and more we see faculty working side by side with their colleagues from other academic departments in a variety of comprehensive initiatives throughout Alabama.

Auburn’s new definition of outreach both supports and encourages these collaborations. Truly, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. In this “perspective,” I challenge you to be a part of this dynamic process of outreach that is very much shaping the way we think about our roles as faculty and as citizens.

“...outreach at Auburn is a dynamic process from which both community and university benefit.”

- Auburn University vice president for University Outreach and associate provost

David Wilson
The Auburn University Outreach website (www.auburn.edu/outreach) contains a variety of information on the university's outreach administration, programs and contacts.

For more information on Outreach strategic initiatives and faculty involvement, contact:
Dr. Robert Montjoy
Assistant Vice President for University Outreach
213 Samford Hall
Auburn University, AL 36849
(334)844-5700
montjrs@auburn.edu

www.auburn.edu/outreach
For other "perspectives" on University Outreach, please see the publications section of the outreach website for:

- Strategic Planning for University Outreach at Auburn University
- Faculty Participation in Outreach Scholarship: An Assessment Model
- University Outreach: University Connections to Society
- Perspectives on Outreach (2001)