

Holland Visit to ECU September 9-13: Observations and Recommendations

Goals for the Visit:

To assist ECU leadership in finding ways to recognize and reward faculty for implementing Public Service and engagement aspects of ECU's mission statement; to facilitate open discussions across the institution regarding current strengths and challenges for Public Service as scholarship; to critique the current situation and provide feedback and suggestions to ECU leaders regarding organizational strategies that support Public Service and the University's mission; to inform the ECU community about current national and international trends that link with the role and benefits of Public Service; to gather community feedback.

The Week's Agenda:

- 6 workshops (Appreciating the Mosaic of Faculty Talent) with clusters of academic disciplines (some chairs and deans attended)
- Meet with EOSA participants – new and alumnae
- Facilitate a Community Partner feedback session
- Meet with IPAR staff regarding Public Service metrics and Knowledge Management
- Meet with Academic Deans and Directors
- Facilitate a Public Service Planning Workshop (admin, faculty, staff and student participants)
- Discuss Public Service and Faculty Rewards with Faculty Senate leaders
- Total of 254 attendees (a few duplications) – excellent mix of disciplines, career stages, perspectives

I. Observations on Institutional Mission and Culture

ECU Mission: “To be a national model for student success, Public Service and regional transformation...”

The ECU mission is simply and clearly stated and widely understood, but only at a very generic level, as a statement of public policy regarding the institution's core purpose. However, **the interpretation or translation of this mission into faculty and staff work priorities, duties, expectations, indicators of success, and beliefs about what is rewarded (and how it will be reviewed) varies enormously across the university and, sometimes even within units**, creating risks and reducing effectiveness within the context of current capacity. For example, some colleges include the scholarship of engagement (SOE) within

tenure and promotion criteria, others are struggling with differentiating SOE from service, and some units still believe that scholarship should only serve the discipline and not the university. Thus there are diverse and competing views of how to apply the mission in daily work, how the mission should shape or guide the university's reputation (current or future), and how the university mission should influence unit priorities and directions.

To fulfill its role and responsibilities within the UNC system and achieve its regional mission, ECU must focus on a balance of teaching, research and Public Service; however, the common perception held by faculty is that teaching dominates faculty time, but research (measured almost exclusively by peer-reviewed publications) is the basis for performance review and rewards. Public Service scholarship and teaching is viewed by most faculty as separate and extra work, with dubious connections to scholarship. Yet, the ECU mission positions Public Service as a form of scholarship and teaching that is essential to the success of the University and the region. This imbalance of institutional goals and mission with working-level faculty culture weakens the performance of ECU and creates risk at a personal level for faculty who choose to practice Public Service scholarship.

One consequence of the lack of a coherent Public Service agenda at ECU, is that there is an extraordinary lack of internal community spirit or sense of unity about the purpose and direction of the university. Collaborative work is enclaved in a few centers (and seen by many as where "innovation" or "exciting work" gets to be done). New, effective strategies that would improve institutional performance such as team teaching, collaborative service-learning, interdisciplinary research or Public Service projects are seen as desirable by many faculty and staff but also (on a practical level) as unattainable because of beliefs (right or wrong) that internal funding policies and diverse unit codes make collaborative work risky, if not impossible. Such a highly decentralized structure supported by decentralized policies and inconsistent interpretation has resulted in a mix of cultural beliefs that have created barriers (real or imagined) to innovation and collaboration. At ECU, these barriers include beliefs such as (but not limited to):

- Only federal grants with overhead count so there is no incentive to get research or project funds from other sources for research or Public Service activities.
- Internal budget policies make collaboration impossible because there is no efficient way to divide or share costs or credit across units.
- Links between student credit hours and budgets make it impossible to consider interdisciplinary teaching.

- Differences in faculty rewards at the unit level make faculty feel that collaborative work is risky.
- Public Service is important to the mission but not rewarded at the individual or unit level.
- Students want/need more experiential and service-learning but faculty believe they will not be rewarded for using such learning strategies.

In particular it is vital to note that many faculty commented that the sole indicator of faculty performance was peer-reviewed publications in a limited set of journals; some could not even imagine that there could be any other performance indicator. Discussions in the meetings revealed a high degree of variability in how faculty members are assessed for their performance. This situation presents great risks in hiring and retaining faculty as more Baby Boomer faculty retire. There are obvious tensions between senior (Silent Generation and Baby Boomer) and junior faculty (Gen X and Y) who have very different working styles but, more importantly, different views of the role and importance of scholarly work and the intersections between teaching/research/Public Service. As academic hiring grows over the next decade, younger faculty will seek to choose campus environments with clear and consistent policies and most will expect to be rewarded for Public Service scholarship. The level of inconsistency at ECU is very high and obvious. For example, during a workshop activity that asked participants to identify how scholarly products of Public Service activities are recognized in the tenure and promotion process, the groups were unable to complete the exercise because each of their units would value certain products completely differently. Such a high degree of variability in rewards severely undermines the capacity of the university to operate effectively as a whole organization in the context of its regional mission.

This imbalanced view of the nature of faculty work is a common problem for regional universities that may articulate a distinct mission but, in the absence of policies, structures and values that align the culture of work and rewards with that mission, tend to end up imitating the scholarly culture of research-centric universities. This misalignment between cultural practices and the actual needs of the institution's mission leads to uneven levels of performance, low morale, and internal competition.

The aforementioned inconsistencies are urgent issues for ECU to address. Current trends in higher education (see workshop presentations for references to growing interdisciplinary and collaborative work, emphasis on current "big questions", and impacts of the generational shift within faculty ranks, etc.), and forthcoming new regulatory frameworks (e.g., degree completion rates) will lead to rewards and

success for those institutions with the following frameworks and capacities in place:

- a clear strategic plan that identifies priorities and actions that inspire collective action in support of the specific mission – ECU as an exemplary regional university,
- a capacity for high levels of internal and external collaboration,
- an integrated view of the roles of teaching/research/Public Service,
- clear curricular pathways that blend classroom, online and experiential/community-based learning models for students,
- a focused agenda of broad topics or themes that lead to greater integration of effort and, thusly, measurable impacts of the institution on current issues of their region, and,
- policies/structures that consistently and equitably reward and nurture individuals for their contributions to a shared agenda of intellectual work, thus creating an organization where each person is working to his/her strengths in the context of the total mosaic of institutional goals and capacities.

The good news is that throughout this week’s visit, many session participants resonated to these trends in higher education and became excited about the opportunity to discuss what these opportunities could mean for ECU. Participants talked enthusiastically about the potential importance of the emerging strategic plan and how these issues need to be addressed explicitly in that plan. The most forward-looking faculty and staff expressed clear ideas about how to integrate Public Service into teaching and research and ways that could be transformative to ECU and the region. Many spoke of their desire for a stronger university “spirit” that could arise from a more strategic involvement of the institution with community as part of scholarship. There is interest and excitement about this agenda; it mostly comes from younger and mid-career faculty but some senior faculty spoke positively as well.

ECU’s current attention to developing a new strategic plan presents an important opportunity to address the current misalignment of mission and culture. Even within a decentralized organization, a compelling strategic action plan can create a framework for a greater sense of institutional unity of purpose and shared values. Attention to an **integrated view of Public Service** is a useful strategy for building a more aligned agenda of work across the university by demonstrating:

- the connections between the university’s intellectual strengths and the region’s needs and opportunities;

- the enhanced capacity that is gained by viewing teaching/research/Public Service as connected actions, and,
- the benefits of greater internal and external collaboration.

Recommendations:

- Engage senate, department chairs, and deans in discussions that separate myths from reality regarding budgetary and personnel policies that are seen as preventing internal collaborations.
 - Identify any real barriers and design methods or procedures to eliminate them or provide for exceptions.
- Create a working team from the disciplines, institutional advancement, research leadership and others to articulate the role of Public Service in attracting new research opportunities and new research funding
 - Develop or make more visible any strategies for receiving and expending external funding from diverse sources, including structures for sharing funds with or through community partner organizations
- Increase professional development and incentives to support implementation of innovative models that integrate aspects of teaching/research/Public Service, including service-learning, undergraduate community-based research, interdisciplinary first year classes, and an intentionally-designed menu of experiential learning opportunities.
- Create pathways for community-based learning experiences throughout the undergraduate experience, and increase opportunities for more students to access these activities. Make strategic decisions about when/where to increase experiential learning for students, preferably in alignment with areas of focus in university-community partnerships.
- Convene and promote greater understanding of generational differences in approaches to academic work.
- Ask units to adopt language that addresses the valuation and review of Public Service as a mode of scholarship; these should be reviewed or developed in collaboration with a Faculty Senate committee to ensure some consistency and also a clear rationale for differences in approach.
 - Provide professional development in assessing and reviewing Public Service as scholarship in order to inform faculty of current trends and changes in peer-review and publishing cultures and practices.
 - Invite Public Service scholars from other universities to work with each disciplinary group and provide successful models worthy of replication.
- Integrate Public Service goals across priorities of the new strategic plan.

II. Organizational Structure and Leadership

In academic organizations, it is generally believed that faculty and staff pay attention to actions that are measured and/or monitored at an individual and/or higher level, are recognized in performance review, and, hopefully, actions that are seen as of strategic importance to the institution or their own unit. These are real motivators that are intended to encourage individuals to act in ways that will be good for the whole organization, but in practice they are usually insufficient and produce uneven performance and confusion over mission. Often overlooked are more specific messages, incentives, goals, policies and rewards that deliberately seek to create a greater sense of organizational cohesion and a sense of shared purpose that calls most faculty, staff, students and leaders to a sense of common direction and pride in the mission of the university.

For regional public universities, a strategic and focused agenda of Public Service as a method of teaching, research and partnership with the region can provide such an inspiring vision and call to collective action. As mentioned above, this begins with attention to Public Service as a scholarly element woven throughout the emerging strategic plan. To date, the approach to Public Service at ECU has been treated largely as a separate, optional activity to be taken up by those who are interested. An investment has been made in recent years to support a director-level position (in the Chancellor's division) with a small budget and no other staff. Management of service-learning has been blended with student volunteering, and there are several different places around campus that keep data on community partnerships. The negative effect this approach has had on faculty interest in Public Service as scholarship has been described already.

This visit revealed a deep and broad passion among faculty and staff (and students and community) to implement more fully the Public Service mission of ECU as a regionally-focused institution in an area full of opportunity for intellectual partnerships of mutual benefit to the institution and its community partners. As described above, this passion has been greatly suppressed by a variety of internal cultural and policy barriers.

So it is clear that the current approach to structure and leadership for the Public Service is insufficient in scope, scale, authority and intentionality. A one-person office in a distant building with little funding is insufficient to support work so central to the core mission of the university. The individuals involved are skilled, productive and respected for their work, but the structure and investment is

inadequate to ensure the full implementation of Public Service in the context of the new strategic plan and new external pressures on higher education. At this time, the future of Public Service is largely dependent on one highly committed and expert person with inadequate resources or authority.

The structural support and leadership for Public Service must reinforce its importance as an integral strategy for delivering and improving teaching, learning, research, and community/regional outcomes. By dividing the functions, making minimal investments, and tolerating high levels of variability in the ways faculty are assessed for their Public Service work, the message is quite clear that Public Service is not seen as a high priority or value of the university's leadership. While university leaders actually do make it clear that they deeply support and respect the role of Public Service as individuals, more institutional action needs to be taken to reduce risk, to improve impact and outcomes, to ensure equity and sustainability, and especially to ensure the equitable and beneficial effects for students, community, faculty and staff as individuals and as a collective enterprise.

The need for leadership with authority and accountability extends to external relationships and perceptions as well. In the community partner focus group held during the week, a diverse group of partners confirmed their awareness of the lack of a cohesive or intentional agenda of Public Service. Their contacts with the university were with one person – creating tenuous connections and great risk in case of changes or problems in the work. Partners were crystal clear that they want one number, one office, one contact at the university; otherwise they don't know where to begin if they have a partnership idea. Partners observe the thin commitment ECU has made to leadership of Public Service and to the rewards for faculty who engage in the work. ECU is "their" university but they aim for a more robust, intentional, and sustained relationship and interaction that values their voice. In particular, partners were clear that they are contributing value to the university (mutual benefit) and feel that is rarely recognized. They were eager to be more involved and collaborative in preparing students and faculty for Public Service work, and want to assist and support the university in enhancing its Public Service capacity...but they also believe it takes a university leadership voice to help make that happen.

Expanding the leadership role and concentrating the accountability, implementation and measurement of Public Service as the goal of this expanded role is essential if ECU is to reap the benefits, financial and intellectual, from a more strategic and integrated approach to Public Service as a form of scholarship and a force for implementing the overall strategic plan.

Note that there would be budgetary expenses associated with expanding the current position to create a unit adequately resourced to provide the leadership and facilitation functions outlined in this report, especially in regard to professional development, coordination/convening (internal and external), and evaluation/measurement/reporting. Most of the recommendations in this report do not require new financial support as much as they involve leading the institution to do current work in new and more effective ways – redirecting effort by using different techniques and actions that produce greater outcomes from current budgets.

Recommendations:

- Again, it is important to integrate Public Service goals into and across the strategic plan to demonstrate its centrality as a strategy to fulfill the mission of the university and as a method for creating greater integration and quality in teaching, learning and research.
 - In all routine institutional discussions regarding teaching, retention, student completion, or discussions of growing research productivity, consider the role of Public Service as a method of teaching, learning and research that may improve outcomes.
 - Consider the impact of policies and procedures on the emerging trends that will define higher education performance and success going forward (the trends listed in the workshops and summarized on page 3 above).
- In addition, the institution would be wise to conduct a joint university/regional analysis of assets and opportunities, leading to a small set of Major Goals or Areas of Focus that will increase the impact of Public Service on the region and facilitate greater efficiency within the university. Setting a few key areas does not block individual projects or ideas – it merely creates a university-wide effort in a few topic areas to create greater effect and benefit.
 - Having identified key topics, organize and convene faculty, staff, community and students to develop shared and complementary activities and projects.
- Increase the rank of the position dedicated to leading Public Service and place it within the ECU structure to signal its value in parallel to teaching and research. Endow the leadership role with authority, accountability and funding to reduce barriers and improve Public Service outcomes and activity. ECU has a unique organizational structure and perhaps some changes may be afoot as part of the strategic plan, but the most successful

placement would be in Academic Affairs if that is designed as the overarching leader of academic culture and strategy.

- All aspects of coordination, support, facilitation of Public Service as scholarship, teaching, and research) should be attached to this role.
- Professional development for faculty is a responsibility of this role, especially in developing faculty skills in engaged teaching and research methods, the presentation of their Public Service scholarship, and techniques for assessment of quality through peer review and other methods.
- The successful Engagement and Outreach Scholars Academy should be continued and expanded. It is a unique and exemplary model providing benefits for the participants, students and the institution.
- Funding for professional development programs and for systems to evaluation and monitor the impacts and outcomes of Public Service must be included to ensure an accurate measurement that is the basis for attracting resources and recognition
- Create a structure where there is ONE point of contact for the regional community, be they current partners or potential new partners. This function must be associated with the Public Service leadership position so that relationships, current and future, can be nurtured and monitored according to consistent institutional values and standards for partnership practices (reduces risk and increases impact). This also creates a locus for ONE data base for partnership activities.
 - Convene community partners at least once a year to hear feedback and to thank them for their role in working with the university.
 - Consider modest rewards/recognition for partners, especially those with long histories of collaboration with faculty and students.
- More structure, in terms of pathways of student development and experience, and more investment is needed for co-curricular volunteerism and opportunities to increase student opportunities for placement in community internships or local/international co-curricular experiences to promote global understanding.
- In addition to the partner database, ECU should develop a systematic approach to capture the level and variety of Public Service activity across the university. Such data is essential for internal planning, recognition and rewards, but also is fundamental to external fund raising and measurement of impacts and outcomes. This function should be led by the PS Leader.