

Condensed Report of the Thought Leader Panel

During the past year, MU Extension canvassed the state and worked with campus stakeholders to learn firsthand the perceptions of MU and its Extension and engagement programs, partnerships and potential. As part of the initiative the *Thought Leader Panel* listened to a broad range of input from MU and its stakeholders.

Our Thought Group

Dr. Stewart brought together a six-member group with extensive experiences and expertise in university engagement and Extension. The team members were:

- Cindy Akers, Texas Tech University,
- Peter Levine, Tufts University,
- Ted Morris, East Carolina University,
- Scott Reed, Oregon State University,
- Jane Schuchardt, (Retired), APLU
- Lou Swanson, Colorado State University,

Our Report

None of our group knew much beyond press reports about the events of 2015 that created a legitimacy crisis for MU. People we spoke with pointed to sharp political and cultural divides within Missouri. Most indicated these were in place prior to 2015. These were a tipping point.

We believe there is a large window of opportunity for re-envisioning engagement initiatives. We also heard three other themes.

Like many Land Grant Universities, MU Extension has a strong emphasis on agriculture – an almost ‘exclusivity’ for agriculture programming. In 2015, it was estimated that 79 percent of Missouri’s population reside in metropolitan areas. UMKC and UMSL serve a large proportion of the state’s population. Enhanced collaboration with these sister universities represents an opportunity for MU Extension and for Mizzou’s engagement programs. There also are opportunities to engage MU colleges not traditionally focused on Extension and engagement.

Our second noted theme is the continuing strength of MU Extension and its resilience as a community-based organization. MU Extension’s commitment to locality and regional programming is a very strong asset.

The third theme was broad support for institutionalizing collaboration. This includes collaboration on campus, with urban and rural communities in economic development, finding solutions to other grand challenges and collaboration across the UM- System.

Thought Group’s Lumping Exercise

Gleaning through interviews, we were struck by the diversity of opinions and facts. Given our short period to make sense of data we lumped comments and themes as summarized below.

MU’s Decentralized College and VP Organizational Structure. A common theme among senior administrators was a tension between a decentralized university structure characterized as

silos. This description holds true for many US public universities. There was a general sense that while decentralization provided for independent and even innovative programs within the silos, presently a decentralized culture makes external silo collaboration 'less likely.'

Communications, Publications and Branding. The common description was extensive fragmentation of messaging. While comments were focused university wide, many of Extension's stakeholders, campus friends and Extension professionals noted that Extension communication within the organization, with MU's colleges and VP and with external clientele can be much improved. Embedded in the comments were implications that improving communications, refining publications and developing a consistent brand is an opportunity.

On campus, among non-Extension professionals, there was a keen interest in knowing more about Extension programing.

Communications that articulate the university's value proposition of inclusivity, recognizing the diversity of stakeholders statewide, without diminishing traditional rural political bases is an opportunity to reframe MU's value proposition. One that communicates a desire for engagement, resulting in solutions to grand challenges and documented public value.

Human Relations and Workforce Management. These interviews revealed tension between underserved and distressed communities desiring greater engagement with MU (and other higher education partners) and the economic realities of supporting a large traditional cadre of place-based subject-matter Extension experts.

Feedback from additional external stakeholders suggests that concurrent public relations efforts and extension workforce adaptations could facilitate a renegotiation of the implicit contract between MU Extension and the many communities, rural and urban, it seeks to serve.

Identity Separation between MU Campus and MU Extension. There is a perception on campus among senior administrators that MU Extension has 'gone native' and does not 'act as defender of MU locally.' Extension administrators extend this to volunteers, who draw a distinction between Extension faculty at county and regional levels and staff on the Columbia campus.

Extension has the potential to position engagement as equal to research and academic programs in helping to meet grand challenges of the state and beyond. Yet, our discussion on campus showed limited interaction between Extension field faculty and campus academicians and researchers. Further, it was reported campus faculty are confused that Extension field personnel are called 'faculty' but do not have tenure or research responsibilities.

Another concern was a lack of clarity about what local presence means for Extension and limited visibility by the public for the University of Missouri through Extension functions across the state.

Perceptions of MU Extension and Continuing Education on campus – Program Prioritization. A clear and consistent message from senior administrators is the high value placed on the Office of Extension and Engagement and its divisions – MU Extension and CE. Unfortunately, in our discussions with Deans and Associate Deans of the colleges, there was little evidence offered that this enthusiasm extends to the faculty and staff.

Bring Research and Engagement into Alignment. A strong and widespread admonition was to more tightly integrate MU's research with engagement.

MU's deep involvement with the National Alliance on Broader Impact already is effectively creating research and engagement opportunities. Another on-campus resource is Office of Social and Economic Data. OSEDA has decades of experience connecting public policy managers and MU together around better decision making through data management and analyses systems.

Another opportunity is expanding on Extension's 4-H STEM education and engagement of stakeholders in various citizen science initiatives. MU is in many ways uniquely positioned to advance the integration of engagement and research.

Harness the rapidly changing technological opportunities. Both on-campus and off-campus stakeholders emphasized the need for Extension and Engagement to move to and stay at the innovation envelope for information technologies and social media.

Rolling out Nexus@Mizzou during the next year should provide an essential tool for cataloguing research and engagement initiatives across campus and externally. Nexus should offer a basis for significantly addressing communications concerns and issues across the fractured communication landscape at MU. We also heard of innovative applications of social media and Smartphone applications.

Extension budget and decision structure. Somewhat similar to the decentralized discussion above, within Extension and amongst stakeholders there were comments on the 'murky' way important decisions are made. Comments noted that there appeared to be multiple gatekeepers for decision-making. Extension faculty should know how and where decisions are made.

Intentionally collaborate with UMKC and UMSL. Dr. Levine met separately with the leadership and stakeholders of MU's sister universities. He uncovered opportunities and the good will to collaborate. Few urban residents know about MU Extension. To the extent, they recognize Extension programs; they would attribute them to UMSL or UMKC, not University of Missouri - Columbia.

Three Big Things

First. Engagement should be a clearly identified as a MU mission area. This Big Idea almost seems too simple and self-evident.

Directly employing 'engagement' in the mission statement, as a recognized scholarly activity, provides an additional rationale to incorporate 'engagement and outreach' as a workload category for faculty and staff promotion and annual merit review. Centering 'engagement' in the mission statement provides rationales for advancing faculty and staff understanding and practice of engagement across all colleges and VP units.

Second. Folding engagement into the mission, boldly embrace place-based community and economic development. Simply, continuing current economic development and community development practices is not what we have in mind. We suggest a paradigm shift from

technical and entrepreneurial assistance to a comprehensive community and economic development portfolio.

Third. Extend the goals of this process to the higher ultimate goal of aligning the values of the institution with those of the public. Almost every group we spoke with on the Columbia campus referenced a deep value divide with the state of Missouri, on campus and within MU Extension.

Opportunities.

Throughout our discussion, we identified opportunities MU can embrace in the near future. We divided these into two categories: university opportunities and MU Extension opportunities.

University Opportunities:

- Engagement should be directly involved in recruiting students statewide
- MU should introduce students to Extension and economic and community development programs. Take urban students into rural areas and rural students into metropolitan areas. Student success is tied to experiential learning. There also is an opportunity for Extension to assist in recruiting students.
- MU is at a positive threshold to take action. Make changes and re-brand
- Advancing Engagement will develop opportunities to recreate MU's social contract with the citizens of Missouri – led by Extension
- Convene public dialogues with UMSL and UMKC across the state, including with Lincoln University, to bridge severe divides by race, partisanship, and urban/rural community
- Extension can help recruit students to all campuses of the University of Missouri System
- UM can learn more about urban serving universities and their civic engagement opportunities, which can be helpful to Extension's work in smaller urban areas.
- Raise brand awareness of the UM-System.
- Position the urban universities and Extension as sources of solutions.
- Establish engagement as equal to research and academic programs in service to Mo.
- Map programs on specific issues, such as workforce development, to identify duplication and increase engagement efficiencies.
- Identify grand challenges for the state, build campus-wide coalitions to engage Missourians in solutions, and tie results to leadership by the University of Missouri.

Opportunities for Extension Programming

- Mental health
- Men's health
- Leadership development
- New farmers and ranchers
- Executive education
- Succession planning
- Technology utilization
- Workforce training and preparation
- Civil Discourse