



## **Who has an ACE at this Place?**

***Benjamin Tanner***

***Geosciences and Natural Resources***

This year I am serving as the provost fellow for Academic Community Engagement (ACE). Parachuting into this position has required me to think about what academic community engagement means, and my understanding is still in flux. The problems I have defining ACE are similar to issues defining sustainability for my students. I usually know it when I see it; it's easy to give examples but a bit more difficult to define precisely. Formal definitions\* typically involve some combination of terms like exchange, reciprocity, partnership, and collaboration between institutions and their communities. I know that many faculty participate in community engagement projects in one way or another and suspect that some are active in ACE without even realizing it.

Academic community engagement looks different in different disciplines. Here are a few examples from WCU's application:

- **River Cane Project.** This was a scientific study of the environmental characteristics of river cane sites to determine ideal growth conditions. It was a collaboration with the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians and led to a restoration project at Cherokee Central Schools.
- **Publicizing Local Charity Work.** Film and Television Production faculty and students helped local charities increase awareness about their services and raise money by providing video documentaries.\*\*
- **Economic Impact of GSMNP Closure.** Local businesses in the region suffered due to the closure of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in 2013 resulting from sequestration. A faculty member and his capstone class in Hospitality and Tourism Management estimated the economic impact of the Park's closure on the region and provided useful information for local and state government agencies.\*\*

\*(e.g. see [Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching definition](#), [WCU definition](#))

\*\*WCU 2014 Elective Community Engagement Classification Application

## **Faculty Outreach**

Some of my work this year includes outreach to faculty to promote, support, and assess community engagement in teaching, service, and scholarship; development of recommendations for institutional academic community engagement; and communication and marketing of academic community engagement. Through reviewing faculty survey results, meeting with faculty members involved in ACE, and poring through documents such as our application for the Carnegie community engagement classification, I have been amazed at the extent of work (teaching, scholarship, and service) being done in the community. I am convinced that there are additional opportunities for engagement that could be pursued if we all had a better idea of what others were doing. There also seems to be a general sense that more should be done to recognize and reward our community engagement efforts. My goal is to now put this feedback to use.

## **Publicizing and Rewarding ACE Projects**

One way to do that is to create a centralized portal identifying ACE projects and resources. As part of a larger redesign effort, we can modify our ACE webpage so that all relevant resources on and off campus, including funding sources, professional development opportunities, and instructional resources are available in one, easily accessible location. Also, we can modify our current Faculty Survey of Curriculum-based Community Engagement Activities so that it is easy to identify ACE projects and migrate them over to the website. Ideally, the website would include a brief synopsis of each project, along with the faculty contact. We could then easily see what others are doing, have a contact if there is the potential for collaboration, and have a vehicle for recognition of the broad range of engagement activities that are taking place at WCU. We could also use this information to recognize and reward exceptional faculty projects. For example, a committee could select a number of projects to further highlight over the subsequent year and potentially reward project leaders with professional development funding. This would encourage us all to report our engagement efforts and would also serve to recognize individuals who have significant engagement activities.

I plan to work closely with Coulter Faculty Commons and the Center for Service Learning as they develop community scholarship incubators (CSI). Laura Cruz and Lane Perry have been busy developing this concept for WCU, and I am excited about the potential to be a part of getting it off of the ground. You will be hearing more about this initiative over the coming weeks and a CSI theme will likely be used for a community scholarship incubator retreat in February.

## **Faculty Participation**

These initiatives will require much behind the scenes organization and work. Also, they will only be carried out successfully if there is significant participation by faculty across disciplines. For example, the availability of resources for an academic community engagement webpage will

require contribution of material from many individuals across campus that have developed successful projects, evaluation instruments, community contacts, etc. If you are interested in academic community engagement, I ask for your help in this endeavor, both in the sharing of ideas and also potentially in the sharing of resources. I also continue to welcome all feedback and look forward to working to further our efforts in academic community engagement over the coming year.

For more information or to share your ideas, contact Ben at [btanner@wcu.edu](mailto:btanner@wcu.edu).

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**Responses to Last Month's Forum, "The Challenges - and Rewards - of Teaching WCU Students with Disabilities" came from School of Teaching and Learning faculty members:**

I enjoyed reading the piece by Vicki Faircloth in the recent Faculty Forum. I was struck by Vicki's honesty and forthrightness about teaching students with disabilities in her undergraduate classes. But why the feelings of nervousness and inadequacy?

When we think about it, every student that we have in a class will take away something different. Some will learn more than others, some will enjoy our presentations and class activities more than others, and some will wish they could be anywhere else rather than in our class more than others. It is the same with people with disabilities, including those with intellectual disabilities.

We all should do our professorial best to facilitate our students' learning, but we also need to recognize the variability of our students. In the last several years, we have been studying what students in the UP program get out of their classes. We have found that some relish the content and often comprehend it more than we thought they might. But we have also found that some seem to enjoy the discussions and interactions with other students more than the content per se. And yes, we have found that some would rather cut class than attend. In other words, we have found that our UP students are much like other WCU students when it comes to taking classes.

So I thank my friend and colleague for her comments, but I hope we will all learn that if we can come to grips with our concerns about differences in ability, we may find that for most students, our courses can add meaning to their lives and perhaps help them enjoy a better future.

**David Westling**

I had so many other things on my agenda this morning, but am so glad that I took the time to read Vicki's essay. I have chills after reading her experiences. Those three students, and others probably untold, are fortunate because she cared so much to make their learning possible. How many other learning situations are missed because we don't stop to really get to know the students who could teach us something about ourselves and humanity, through their different

lives and experiences? Thank you for sharing your story, Vicki, and Lisa for sharing understanding of the history of IDEA. We should all be more willing to discuss our hesitations of teaching to meet the needs of all students. We'd all be better for it.

**Pam Buskey**

I read Vicki's Faculty Forum earlier today and want to thank her for sharing her thoughts and feelings with all of us. I found the article inspiring. It is refreshing to read such a personal reflection, crafted with such insight. I really appreciate Vicki's taking the time to write such a fine commentary.

**Dave Strahan**

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### **Editor's Note**

**You can write for the Faculty Forum.** The Faculty Forum will be published on the third Monday of each month during the fall and spring semesters. This month's issue is the last of this semester. Please consider contributing to campus conversations by submitting to one or both of these sections.

**1. Lead Commentary.** This is an essay written by a faculty member addressing an issue, hot topic, or general faculty concern. They usually run anywhere from 750 to 1000 words, but they can be longer or shorter, and they can be collaborations from two or more faculty.

**2. Responses.** These are faculty comments about and reactions to the previous months' FF. They are often substantive, even critical responses to the essay of the previous month. The **Responses** section is a great way to engage in discussion around campus.

**Email me at [mherzog@wcu.edu](mailto:mherzog@wcu.edu) to discuss your ideas or responses.**