

Civic Vision for the University: Community Engaged Scholarship

Middle Tennessee State University
Faculty Working Group on Engaged Scholarship

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Executive Summary

This white paper documents the findings of a year-long study conducted by a faculty working group at Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU). MTSU is dedicated to fostering community-engaged scholarship across its campus as a central institutional mission. The paper highlights the university's current strategies to accomplish the goal, outlines the need for systemic support in faculty promotion and tenure processes, and proposes recommendations to fully integrate community engagement into the university's culture.

The study employs mixed methods. It reviews both theoretical literature on what community engagement entails and empirical examples of successful models of engaged scholarship from other institutions. It then analyzes MTSU's tenure and promotion policies at the university level. A survey has also been carried out among MTSU faculty to assess their engagement, awareness, interest, and the perceived value of community-engaged scholarship within current tenure and promotion policies.

Key findings of the study are as follows:

- Current tenure and promotion policies at MTSU do not explicitly recognize community-engaged scholarship, which could dampen faculty's enthusiasm and hinder its development.
- MTSU faculty show moderate awareness of and involvement in community engagement activities, but significant interest in further integrating community engagement into teaching and research, and mixed perceptions of the value of community engagement in tenure and promotion processes.

Major recommendations are proposed below responding to the above findings:

- To incentivize faculty, unequivocally incorporate community-engaged research as a category of scholarly activity in tenure and promotion policies, offer clear guidelines on the diverse formats of capturing and documenting community-engaged research efforts, and establish detailed criteria for evaluating the outputs and impacts of engaged scholarship.
- To incentivize campus-wide activities, reward engaged research through a variety of ways, such as merit pay and grant opportunities.
- To build up logistical infrastructure, establish a Center for Community Engagement to centralize resources, facilitate grant applications, and promote interdisciplinary collaborations.
- To increase awareness and involvement, reinforce the educational and training efforts through targeted communications and programming to expose the university community to the benefits and opportunities of engaged scholarship.

The faculty working group is optimistic that implementing the proposed recommendations will foster an environment where engaged scholarship is not only recognized but celebrated, and thus will further enhance MTSU's role as a leader in civic and community engagement.

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Introduction

To advance civic learning and community-engaged pedagogy across the disciplines at Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU), community-engaged scholarship (or, public scholarship) needs concomitantly to flourish throughout MTSU campus culture. Supporting engaged scholarship within faculty tenure and promotion incentives develops and drives community-engaged research, which in turn energizes community-engaged teaching. The white paper presented here provides a summary of MTSU's context for the work, case studies and scholarship from peer universities already utilizing engaged scholarship in faculty advancement criteria, an assessment of current MTSU faculty engagement in public research, and recommendations for university forward-action to support community-engaged scholarship at MTSU.

MTSU's Civic Context

Middle Tennessee State University's quest-for-student-success strategic plan clearly articulates the university's objective of graduating professionally-successful, lifelong-learning, engaged and responsible citizens (*Quest 2025*, 2020, p. 2). Toward this goal, the university has successively set in place concrete pedagogical practices to enhance, develop, and support institutionalization of this university-wide vision.

In 2006, in embedding experiential learning into Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU) high impact practices, the university emplaced a system to encourage student personal and intellectual growth beyond the classroom through experiential learning (*Experiential Learning at MTSU*, 2006), concurrently establishing campus-wide programming for civic engagement (*About the project*, 2003). In 2016, advancing its commitment and intensifying its purpose, the university next stepped quality enhancement planning by assisting faculty in developing strengthened curricula to engage students even more deeply and directly in their own learning (*MT engage*, 2016).

The rationale for enacting this MTSU vision is built on more than thirty years of academic scholarship on student success through service learning, civic learning, public work, and democratic engagement (Boyte & Hollander, 1999; Colby, et al., 2003, 2007; Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011; National Task Force, 2012; Boyte, 2015; Chittum, et al., 2022; Klaw, et al., 2024), the integrated purpose of which is educating for democracy, civic responsibility, community-building, the public good, and every citizen's role—our students' roles and our faculty's roles—in community engagement.

MTSU's commitment has been historically vigorous in this work, yet in order to successfully impact even more students, it is imperative to broaden and deepen civic learning and community engagement across the disciplines at Middle Tennessee State University. Civic learning must become an "undisputed educational priority" that is "pervasive, not partial; central, not peripheral" to our university's work, climate, and identity (National Task Force, 2012, p. 2). To realize this objective, to comprehensively expand community-engaged teaching and learning throughout *all* departments and across *all* colleges of the institution, university faculty must be encouraged and supported in the work. With critically important pedagogical innovations already extensively employed within MTSU over twenty years,¹ the university is recommitting to civic learning and public scholarship through community engagement. In 2023 it convened two campus-wide, all-disciplines Faculty Working Groups—on Community Engaged Pedagogy and Community Engaged Scholarship (Smith, 2023)—to advance the two parallel objectives. Concomitant with them both is support of faculty through professional advancement. In this examination, community engaged scholarship (also termed engaged scholarship and public scholarship) is evaluated and strongly endorsed.

¹For example, EXL, MT Engage, civic learning, AAC&U high impact practices and VALUE rubrics, integrative reflective writing, e-portfolios, faculty learning communities on civic engagement, Raider learning communities on civic learning and community engagement, EXL 3030 civic engagement practica, the American Democracy Project, Constitution week, student voting syllabus and classroom inclusions, register-to-vote buttons on university webpages, African American history month, women's history month, AAPI history month, civic learning GenEd outcomes, MTSU's NEH grant Bridging Cultures: Religious Pluralism in Tennessee statewide civic engagement faculty-development project, and community engagement programs and projects in almost every discipline and college university wide, to reference only a few.

Community Engagement through Engaged Scholarship

To broaden and deepen community engagement, throughout all departments and across all colleges of the institution, university faculty must be encouraged in public scholarship, and, concomitantly, faculty must be supported and professionally advanced in undertaking increased community-engaged scholarship. The charge to the Faculty Working Group on Engaged Scholarship (Smith, 2023) was to investigate what community-engaged scholarship is for MTSU; to address what community engagement looks like in scholarship and practice and how MTSU can engage with its community partners in ways that honor the goals of reciprocity, mutual benefit, and epistemic justice; to explore how community-engagement pedagogies—considered community-based research and community-based learning—promote student civic-mindedness and foster faculty research agendas that have mutual benefit; and to share its deepened understanding with the MTSU community to advance MTSU’s institutional knowledge and its application of community-engaged scholarship (Prospectus, 2023).

MTSU’s current working definition for community engagement is:

The equitable collaboration among MTSU and the communities of which we are a part (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge, information, and resources in the context of partnership and reciprocity in active pursuit of social justice resulting in positive transformation for all. It can involve partnership and coalitions that help mobilize resources and influence systems and serve as catalysts for initiating and/or changing policies, programs, and practices. The quality and impact of community engagement are determined by academic peers and/or community partners (MTSU, 2023).

Peer and neighbor institution University of North Carolina Greensboro (UNCG) clarifies that community engagement “requires collaborative, reciprocal processes that recognize, respect, and value the knowledge, perspective, and resources shared among partners,” such that it “serve[s] a public purpose [and] builds the capacity of each of the individuals, groups, and organizations involved to understand and collaboratively address issues of public concern” (What’s the difference, 2024). UNCG’s

definition builds on the wording of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching that defines community engagement as

collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity. The purpose of community engagement is the partnership of college and university knowledge and resources with those of the public and private sectors to enrich scholarship, research, and creative activity; enhance curriculum, teaching, and learning; prepare educated, engaged citizens; strengthen democratic values and civic responsibility; address critical societal issues; and contribute to the public good (What is community engagement?, 2024).

Institutions with “extraordinary commitments” to community engagement can be nationally recognized by the Carnegie Foundation, a valued acknowledgment, for the universities’ “evidence-based documentation of institutional policy and practices focusing on areas such as institutional culture and mission, curricular and co-curricular programming, continuous improvement activities, and the recruitment and reward of faculty, staff, and students” (What are elective classifications?, 2024). In 2008 and 2015, the Carnegie Foundation awarded Middle Tennessee State University with the esteemed designation as an actively community-engaged campus (Classified campuses, 2024).

To grow campus-wide quality and to continue to strengthen MTSU’s culture of engaged teaching, service, and scholarship, the main question to be addressed by our Faculty Work Group on Engaged Scholarship is: What deeper, more extensive, more thorough, more integrative processes and procedures does MTSU currently need, to reshape and heighten community engagement across and within the university going forward, particularly through engaged scholarship of our faculty and university research institutes?

With a majority of MTSU faculty already using many high impact practices, our goal is to build upon these practices by focusing more proactively on engaged scholarship. The mission of community engagement is most clearly expressed through community-engaged scholarship. If community engagement is going to be part of our institutional identity as a research university, it has to be

encouraged, supported, and valued as scholarly activity, particularly within formalized recognition and reward structures such as tenure and promotion.

Other universities across the country have been supporting and advancing community-engaged scholarship for decades, and thus can serve as models for MTSU. Noteworthy examples of institutions that have long embraced community-engaged scholarship, and have expanded their tenure and promotion pathways, include Portland State University, Mississippi State University, UNC Greensboro, Virginia Tech, and many others (Community engaged research academy, 2024; Community-engaged scholarship, 2024; Ozer, et al., 2024; Denny, 2018; Piercy, et al., 2011; Jordan, et al., 2009). These institutions studied the impact of community-engaged scholarship throughout the early 2000s, identified key findings, and implemented structural changes that supported faculty, shifted campus culture, advanced programming, and expanded pedagogy. Based on the work of these institutions, similar in size and mission to MTSU, the verdict on the value of community-engaged scholarship has been determined as a necessary and useful function of a university.

The Faculty Work Group on Engaged Scholarship at Middle Tennessee State University has studied the potential impact of promoting scholarly engagement within our own academic environment. Specifically, the group has pursued the following research issues: the identification of current and recent community-engagement research activities pursued by MTSU faculty, the role of successful scholarly engagement in the tenure and promotion process, and the actions necessary to create an environment conducive to engaged scholarly inquiry among MTSU faculty.

Literature Review

This literature review aims to provide context, background, and examples of established practices from other institutions towards recommending strategies for strengthening community-engaged scholarship at MTSU. First, current tenure and promotion policies will be explored

in depth. Next, prevalent models of engaged scholarship will be explained. Several examples of how other institutions have explicitly encouraged community-engaged scholarship in policy will be provided.

Tenure and Promotion Policies

Tenure and promotion policies serve as the most important incentive system driving faculty preference and performance. While current university policies at MTSU hold promising opportunities for engaged scholarship, reform of the policies is needed to ensure systemic support for faculty and cultivate sustained campus momentum for community engagement.

Current policies provide a broad definition of research and recognize the diverse forms of scholarship. As stated in both Tenure (204, II, K) and Promotion (205, III, D) policies,

research/scholarship/creative activity encompasses the studious inquiry, examination, or discovery that contributes to disciplinary and interdisciplinary bodies of knowledge and is disseminated to an appropriate audience. Research/scholarship/creative activity may include, but is not limited to, disciplinary and interdisciplinary activities that focus on the boundaries of knowledge, field-based scholarship, creative activities (e.g., media production, performances, or other artistic creations), the scholarship of teaching and learning, born-digital scholarship (e.g., digital tools, software for teaching and research, websites, public humanities projects, and grant-writing to support such activities).

Officially, therefore, this generous and inclusive definition of research and scholarship could accommodate community-engaged projects and efforts.

In addition, current policies require candidates for tenure (204, VI., A.) and promotion (205, VI, A) to demonstrate commitment to institutional mission and goals. MTSU mission identifies public engagement as one of the ways for students, faculty, and staff to “generate, preserve, and disseminate knowledge and collaboratively promote excellence.” Along with its mission, part of the MTSU purpose is to support “communities throughout the region” by developing and sustaining “academic partnerships, entrepreneurial activities, and public service” (*Mission Statement*, 2023). Having public engagement and community support enshrined in institutional mission and purpose should encourage faculty to incorporate community engagement into their research agendas effectively.

Despite the potential opportunities, however, the existing policies' lack of explicitly mentioning community-engaged research also risks its undervaluation in tenure and promotion considerations. The risk is especially heightened when the sanctioned documentation of research heavily favors peer-reviewed publications (204, VI, D, 2; 205, VI, D, 2) because engaged scholarship outputs may not align neatly with this traditional measure of research productivity.

To prevent the risk and achieve full acknowledgment and reward for engaged scholarship, three recommendations are proposed on reforming the tenure and promotion policies:

- Unequivocally incorporate community-engaged research as a category of scholarly activity
- Offer clear guidelines on the diverse formats of capturing and documenting community-engaged research efforts
- Establish detailed criteria for evaluating the outputs and impacts of engaged scholarship.

In summary, although MTSU's existing tenure and promotion policies contain implicit support for engaged scholarship, the absence of explicit recognition and clear assessment criteria and documentation specifications may present obstacles for faculty conducting community-engaged research during the very crucial career advancement process. The proposed recommendations aim to create a more inclusive and equitable incentive structure and thus a more rewarding environment for faculty committed to the engaged scholarship. By doing so, MTSU can lead in recognizing the full spectrum of academic excellence and setting a precedent for other institutions to follow.

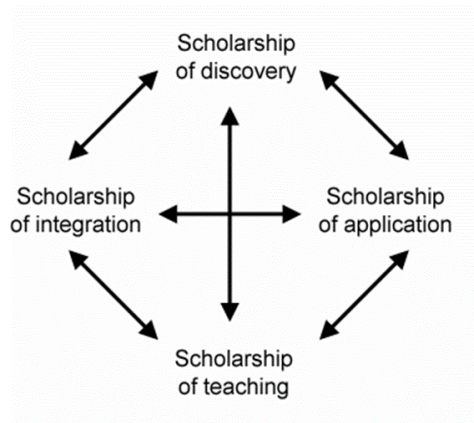
Models of Engaged Scholarship

In the past few decades several models have been proposed to support engaged scholarship at the individual level (Van deVen, 2007) and at the institutional level (Franz 2016; Boyer, 1996; UniSCOPE

Learning Community, 2008). Here we will examine two foundational models, Boyer's model and Franz's holistic model, that are useful to understand engaged scholarship at the institutional level.

Ernest Boyer's model on engaged scholarship categorizes scholarship into four "essential and interlocking" (Boyer, 1996, p. 16) types: discovery, application, sharing, and integration. Three out of these four categories, namely, discovery, application, and sharing broadly correspond to the traditional definitions of research, teaching, and outreach at universities. The fourth category of integration emphasizes cross-disciplinary efforts by faculty in research, teaching, and outreach, in which "energies of several disciplines tend enthusiastically to converge" (Boyer, 1996, p. 16). According to Boyer, an expanded view of scholarship is needed beyond the traditional structure because the "faculty reward system often does not match academic functions, and professors often find themselves caught between competing obligations" (Franz, 2016, p. 198).

Fig 1: Boyer's four types of scholarship

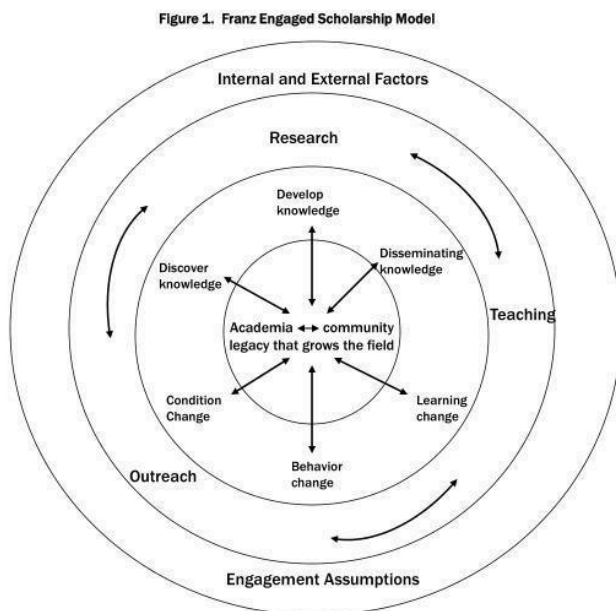


Another widely used engaged scholarship model that was proposed by Nancy Franz in 2010 builds on Boyer's model and adds to it by "addressing the day-to-day context of faculty involved in engaged scholarship" (Franz, 2016, p. 199). A unique aspect of Franz's model is that it takes into

consideration the intertwined nature of the missions of the individual scholar and that of the institution to “realize holistic engaged scholarship” (Franz, 2016, p. 201).

As illustrated in figure 2, the model is constructed as a set of concentric circles that are nested within each other. The inner circle provides the definition of engaged scholarship in which academia and the community are in a reciprocal relationship with each other and the reciprocity causes the legacy to grow the field. This definition drives the six leverage points of engaged scholarship situated in the next ring. The six leverage points engaged in by scholars and communities are comprised of discovery of new knowledge, development of new knowledge, dissemination of new knowledge, change in learning, change in behavior, and change in condition. The ring comprising the six leverage points is nested within the next circle that contains the three missions of the university, namely, teaching, research, and outreach. Finally, the outermost circle consists of internal-external factors and a set of assumptions that impact the scholars and communities in their ability to conduct the work as delineated in the inner circles.

Fig. 2: Franz’s holistic model of engaged scholarship



Just like Boyer, Franz’s model provides an expansive view of community-engaged scholarship. The inner circle, by providing the definition of engaged scholarship, serves as the foundation for the outer circles. The second circle with the six leverage points is an individual application of engaged scholarship by the faculty member. Each of the six points encourages “critical reflection, enhanced action, and production of scholarship between faculty and community members” (Franz, 2016, p. 204). The third circle represents the three missions of teaching, research, and outreach as a traditional institution-wide view of engaged scholarship. This third circle is a superset to the second circle. This suggests that “each faculty member should be cognizant of all three institutional missions and should take an integrated approach by building teams of scholars across missions for a more holistic approach to engaged scholarship” (Franz, 2016, p. 204). The outermost circle represents interinstitutional elements that tend to be found at all institutions of higher education. These elements include internal factors (such as faculty reward and promotion systems, lack of interest in collaboration, funding, and organizational leadership), external factors (such as communication, flexibility, trust, and available resources), and assumption (such as clear goals, importance of engaged scholarship in tenure and

promotion reviews, and reflective critique). The internal-external factors and the assumptions of individuals or institutions about engaged scholarship directly impact their work.

Franz's model of engaged scholarship provides a wide-lens panoramic viewpoint of engaged scholarship that integrates understanding, application, and dissemination of the work across individual, institutional, and wider community levels. It also suggests "the importance of having a variety of entry points to practice and tell the story of engaged scholarship so that faculty with a variety of roles can see themselves as engaged scholars" (Franz, 2016, p. 201).

Examples of Key Findings from Other Institutions

Mississippi State University

Objective

In 2010, Mississippi State University (MSU) was awarded the Community Engagement Classification by the Carnegie Foundation in recognition of its commitment to community engagement through teaching, research, and public service. The university's primary aim was to become a prominent participant in a national group of institutions dedicated to community engagement. The focus was to ensure a process of ongoing reflection and strengthening collaborative endeavors beyond the institution with external communities of practice (*About - Mission & History - CCEL - Mississippi State University, n.d.*). In 2018, at MSU President Keenum's request, a committee was assembled and tasked with reexamination of the university's alignment with Carnegie standards. The university had always believed that community engagement was an integral part of the institution's DNA, so to support its work, the committee applied for the 2020 Carnegie classification. During this time, stakeholders from various university programs engaged in dialogues about practical, fair, and ethical ways to strengthen community engagement on campus. "In this way, the pursuit of the Carnegie classification is both a means and an

end" (*About - Mission & History - CCEL - Mississippi State University, n.d.*). The institution has acknowledged the Carnegie framework as a means for Mississippi State University to be more intentional and systematic in developing practical and equitable community engagement infrastructure. By aligning the university's efforts with national best practices, including strategies for institutional partnerships, rewarding faculty, integrating curricula, and assessing outcomes for students, faculty, partners, and the institution, Mississippi State University aims to enhance its community engagement initiatives (*About - Mission & History - CCEL - Mississippi State University, n.d.*).

Work They Did

In February 2018, the University Community Engagement Committee conducted a survey to evaluate MSU faculty involvement with communities and organizations. As a result of this initiative, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching awarded the institution the Community Engagement Classification. The distinction helped to reaffirm the institution's commitment to enhancing community partnerships across Mississippi (*About - Mission & History - CCEL - Mississippi State University, n.d.*). Under the guidance of the MSU's Provost and the Office of Student Leadership and Community Engagement, a committee of cross-campus stakeholders, including faculty, staff, students, and alumni from various units, initiated an application process to Carnegie for Community Engagement. The goal was to capture a diverse range of perspectives on the topic of community engagement.

Responsibilities of the committee included:

- Ensuring a consistent and unified approach in evaluating community engagement initiatives throughout the university.
- Assist with critical application steps, including assessment, evaluation, and narrative development.

- Solicit greater participation and investment in Carnegie Community Engagement across units by building momentum and buy-in to the purpose and process.
- Develop a data-driven application that showcases MSU's plan of action, impact, and community engagement.

The committee's assessment of community engagement included a campus-wide survey to capture perceptions, understanding, and implementation of practices connected to community engagement.

(Note: Actual wording of survey)

Results

Responses from the survey revealed various levels of knowledge about community engagement. Data revealed that some respondents had participated in activities and programs around community engagement at MSU. In contrast, others reported their involvement with community engagement as a direct part of job responsibilities. Approximately 54% of faculty reported participation in community engagement in teaching and learning, 36.6% in research and scholarship, and 73.6% were engaged in service. Other survey results indicated a strong link between community engagement and students' success, its usefulness in promoting critical research based on existing strengths, and its global impact in enhancing the academic and cultural experiences of stakeholders (*About - Mission & History - CCEL - Mississippi State University, n.d.*).

Findings from the committee's recommendations focused on the following themes:

- Refine systems of accountability and coordination
- Instill a dedication to diversity and broad scope
- Ensure that communication is relevant and meaningful, developing appropriate mechanisms
- Establish ways to measure and track desired engagement initiatives

- Install assets and incentives.
- Provide opportunities for training and mentorship

Colorado State University

Objective

The purpose of the Community Engaged Scholarship efforts at Colorado State University was to raise awareness and facilitate discussions within the College of Liberal Arts. The aim was to illuminate the unique work of faculty stakeholders, although rigorous and valuable, may not be acknowledged or reflected in the processes and policies that lead to promotion and tenure. Scholarly work from an extensive range of disciplines continues to be produced by faculty within the College of Liberal Arts, representing diverse topics and approaches. This scholarly work includes collaborations with community entities to produce research and shared expertise around critical issues that serve the public interest. Additionally, college stakeholders understood that failure to recognize their work hinders support toward the university's long-standing mission as a land-grant institution. Four interrelated areas of focus encompassed discussions of how faculty are acknowledged for efforts around community engagement, including traditional thoughts regarding interrelationships about faculty effort; perceptions of the peer-review process, how quality scholarship is defined, and how to select information is communicated to campus and external community stakeholders (Carolan & Withers, 2018).

Work They Did

Faculty in the College of Liberal Arts initiated discussions to support community-engaged research. Their work focused on aligning research aims with university promotion and tenure expectations and its mission as a land grant institution. The college recognized the importance of embracing traditional research while actively taking a more inclusive approach to all forms of exemplary scholarship, including community-involved research already occurring. Conversations were held at the

provost level with input from stakeholders across the campus, inviting feedback and building consensus on the university's vision of Community Engagement (Carolan & Withers, 2018).

Anticipated Results

The goal of their efforts was to answer critical questions regarding how to effectively articulate the value of community-engaged research, what point of engaged scholarship aligns with various aspects of faculty duties such as teaching and service, and how to define actions of engaged activities across units as the institution continued to lead discussions around the work of community-engaged scholarship. The result of discussions prompted revisions to codes to make them more inclusive of engaged scholarship and current handbook policies. Specifically, each department was tasked to create its discipline-specific standards for a comprehensive evaluation of the faculty's work. These standards were influenced by the "Six Categories of Assessment and Evaluation of Scholarship" proposed by Glassick et. al. in 1997, including clear goals, adequate preparation, appropriate methods, significant results, effective presentation, and reflective.

Virginia Tech University

Objective

Using illustrations and examples, the work carried out at Virginia Tech University (VT) aimed to provide a precise explanation of engaged scholarship that could be utilized by faculty seeking promotion, tenure, and favorable merit reviews. The university has supported engaged scholarship for years and acknowledged the successful work of the faculty in achieving promotion and tenure. Therefore, it was important for the university to clarify that the goal of the work is not to make engaged scholarship the sole way to achieve promotions and tenure. Nor is the goal to replace existing criteria, such as

publications and grants. It also reinforces the fact that it is not required for every faculty member to participate in community or industry partner-engaged collaborations.

Work They Did

The work at Virginia Tech regarding community-engaged scholarship centered around the construction and publication of a white paper. The university's white paper highlights key characteristics most associated with engaged scholarship, including collaborative partnerships between university and community groups and beneficial reciprocal, respectful, transformative processes (Shore, et al., 2008). Engaged scholarship is a critical element in helping attract and retain students since many students appreciate active and experiential learning. Its usefulness can also motivate more students to pursue research (Langseth, et al., 2004). VT's work also included a case study entitled "Documenting Engaged Scholarship in Promotion and Tenure (P&T) Documents and Faculty Annual Reports," where four preeminent faculty-engaged scholars in the College of Liberal Arts were interviewed about their work to glean more about the integration of their work with the demands of a research institution. Their contributions to the whitepaper also included detailed information about suggested literature around community-engaged scholarship from faculty and students at the university. These examples served to illustrate work being done around engaged scholarship.

Results

The intended results of their work are to encourage and motivate faculty to advocate for their work around engaged scholarship and clarify the process.

Campus Compact

Campus Compact holds an extensive collection of resources that help to define, illustrate, and provide examples of engaged scholarship. According to Campus-Compact (2022), “Engaged scholarship (ES) can be defined as scholarly activities focused on social, civic, economic, educational, artistic, scientific, environmental, and cultural well-being of people and places beyond the academy” (*What Is Engaged Scholarship? A Resource Collection | Campus Compact, 2022*). ES recognizes that various social challenges can be effectively addressed through cooperative partnerships on campus and within the greater community. Campus Compact has presented a set of crucial competencies called Community Engagement Fundamentals. These competencies serve as a guideline for critical skills that should be utilized to accurately capture the foundations of the field and the breadth of community-engaged work:

1. Understanding multiple original community ideas and a fluid definition of community engagement.
2. An understanding of established guidelines for moral and impactful community engagement.
3. An understanding of various methods of public service and collective actions to address issues.
4. The importance of community-engaged work as a critical component of college and university work cannot be overstated.
5. The capacity to explain the nature of robust partnerships between campus and community.
6. The capacity to explain the significance of equity and inclusion embedded work around community engagement.
7. The capacity to explain the issues faced by campus stakeholders such as faculty, staff, and students around community-engaged work.
8. Understanding of various ways community engagement can merge with academic courses of studies and campus activities.
9. An understanding of thriving community- and civic-engaged education.
10. Awareness of successful cases of civic engagement and community-based research.

Established Strategies for Success

Creating research opportunities within the middle Tennessee area depends on MTSU leveraging its political capital, financial resources, faculty expertise, and other human capital to provide research opportunities for faculty.

Long-term commitment, sustainability, and focus on knowledge generation, application, and dissemination are among the issues that force partners to address sustainable funding early in the planning process (Fitzgerald, et al., 2000, p. 16).

In “Campus-Community Partnerships: Perspectives on Engage Research,” Fitzgerald, Allen, and Roberts argue that “all members of a partnership should contribute responsibly and work together to seek both short-term and long-term funding for program activities” (Fitzgerald, et al., 2000, pp. 16-17). For instance, when a university-community partnership focuses on evaluating a program, both parties are expected to include fund raising in the planning stage (Fitzgerald et al., 2000, p. 17). If seed grants fund pilot studies in preparation for larger studies, those grants are considered venture capital that require matching funding from each partner. In these partnerships, partners cannot view the other as a prime source of funding for the program (Fitzgerald, et al., 2000, p. 17). Shared responsibility for long-term funding is addressed by administrative managements that are created for each partnership. These administrative partnerships have generated a “working recipe for success” (Fitzgerald, et al., 2000, p. 19).

Working recipe for success

- An early victory
- Reconciliation of differences in community and university cultures
- Reciprocal, long-term commitment
- Coherent, common community-building agenda
- Candor and confidentiality

- Patient clarification and re-clarification of mutual expectations and benefits
- Creative solutions to other challenges
- Rewards, incentives, and support for both staff and faculty
- Shared responsibility for long-term funding

The recipe above illustrates how a foundation of sustained community engagement necessary for engaged research becomes grounded in economic interdependency and shared interests between the university and the surrounding community, and cemented in their mutual interest.

An exemplar of this type of interdependency is the Cleveland Foundation. The Cleveland Foundation consists of rooted institutions (Cleveland Clinic, University Hospitals, the VA Hospital, and Case Western Reserve University) focused on leveraging business activity that included their enormous supply chains to benefit the community. Together, these rooted institutions redirected an agreed upon portion of their procurements, of nearly \$3 billion combined, into the areas surrounding them. Implementing this project involved “building consensus with the rooted institutions, demonstrating that the project was in their interest and had a reasonable chance of success” (Hoyt, 2013, p. 63).

Another example is the Community Research Collaborative in Salt Lake City, Utah, which consists of University Neighborhood Partners, Urban Research + Action, the Bennion Center at the University of Utah, and the University of Utah. The Community Research Collaborative’s *In it together: Community-based research guidelines for communities and higher education* (2021) provide guidelines regarding discussions of “resources or supports needed to help everyone participate” and the question of “How will people be compensated and recognized for their work?” (Community Research Collaborative, 2021, p. 14). The document, *In it together*, also provides a paragraph about including necessary funds in grant proposals and includes questions of funding and support in its Partnership Agreement (Community Research Collaborative, 2021 p. 20).

A more familiar example of engaged research partnership between a university and its surrounding community is Western Kentucky University's Research Foundation (WKURF). The foundation's motto is Discovery, Research, Creativity, and Service (WKURF, 2024) and consists of a board whose members represent expertise in the sciences, technology, entrepreneurship, business development, economic development, and fundraising. WKURF clearly demonstrates the strong relationship between engaged research and economics, but also supports projects as diverse as the creation of Kentucky's first Center for Child Welfare and Research and the collaboration between the university and the Kentucky Folklife Program and the Kentucky Museum (WKURF, 2019). The Center for Child Welfare Education and Research (CCWER) provides an applied research trajectory that addresses the myriad current challenges of child welfare work in the state of Kentucky (WKURF, 2019). The Kentucky Folklife Program partners with WKU graduate Folk Studies students to provide opportunities for students and community members to create narrative stages for Kentucky's Heritage Festival every year on a variety of topics that include traditional foods, material culture, music, and storytelling (WKURF, 2020).

This literature review serves to delineate current policies for tenure and promotion, explain current models of community-engaged scholarship, and describe key findings from other institutions which have sought to explicitly enhance community-engaged scholarship. Given MTSU's Community Engaged Carnegie classification, what community-engaged scholarship is already being implemented by MTSU faculty and how do these faculty feel it is supported by MTSU as an institution?

Methodology

The Faculty Working Group (FWG) focusing on Engaged Scholarship began meeting once a month during the Fall 2023 semester to begin the process of designing this study. Following a review of the literature and extensive discussion, the group determined the study would define community engagement as “the collaboration (among) institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity” (*Engaged Scholarship Definitions*, n.d.).

The FWG decided to conduct a survey of MTSU faculty to gauge their understanding and practice of community engagement. Surveys provide information about attitudes and behaviors about a “predetermined population” (Couglan et al., 2009). Furthermore, universities across the United States have used surveys to understand faculty perceptions of and involvement in community engagement (Boyer, 1990; Denny, 2018; Karpyn & McCallops, 2020). The FWG developed a survey including Likert-type scales and open-ended questions using items from three existing surveys (Boyer, 1990; Denny, 2018; Karpyn & McCallops, 2020) to explore awareness, involvement, and interest relating to community engagement, as well as items relating to promotion and tenure relating to community engagement. Only faculty who selected that they were tenured or on the tenure-track saw the items related to promotion and tenure. All items were modified when appropriate for consistency in wording throughout the survey. Although responses to the survey were anonymous, respondents were given the opportunity to provide contact information if they were willing to be interviewed about their community engagement work. Demographic information collected included college name, title (including rank if necessary), years at MTSU, and gender identity (man, woman, non-binary, or “I describe my gender in another way” with an open response option). This survey research was approved through the MTSU IRB under IRB-FY2024-11. R/RStudio and Excel were used for analysis.

Results

After distribution of the survey through email to approximately 1,000 MTSU faculty and staff, a total of 158 responses were collected (~16% response rate). After discarding unusable responses ($n=2$), a sample of $n = 156$ were included in the final dataset. Demographics are shown in Figure 3. Participants spanned the seven colleges of MTSU and the Walker

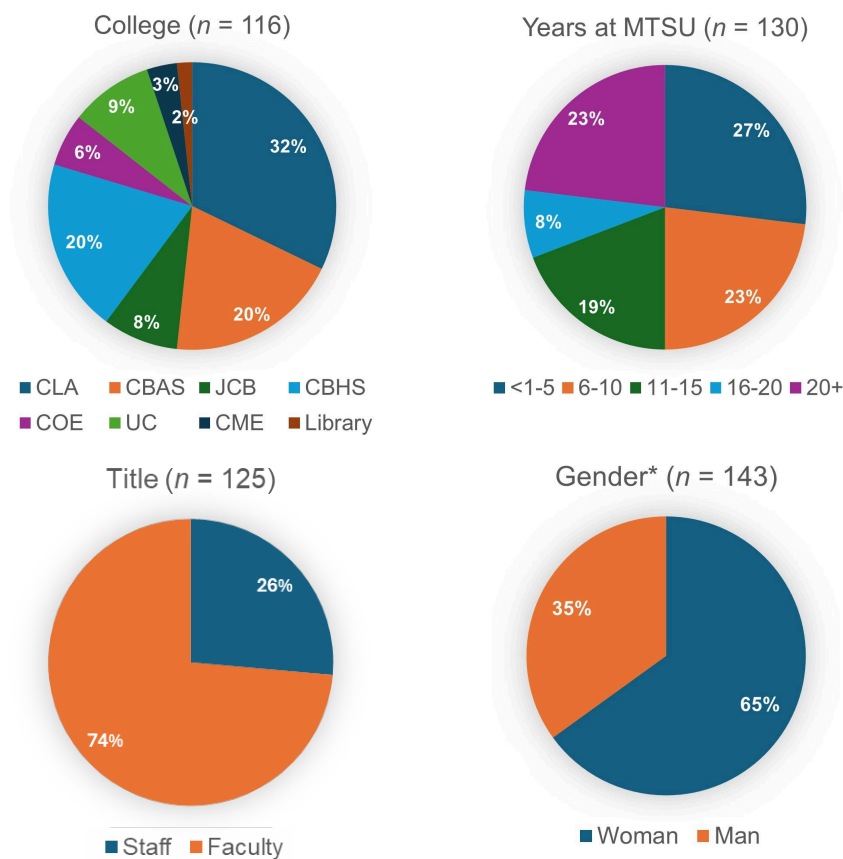


Figure 3. Demographics for participants including college ($n=116$), years at MTSU ($n = 130$), title ($n = 125$), and Gender ($n = 143$). *We chose to omit the percentage of non-conforming gender participants due to the small number of participants and concern about anonymity.

Library, with the highest percentage of participants in our sample from the College of Liberal Arts (CLA) at 32% along with the College of Basic and Applied Sciences (CBAS) and College of Behavioral & Health Sciences (CBHS) at 20% each. The additional makeup of our participant sample included 9% from

University College (UC), 8% from Jones College of Business (JCB), 6% from the College of Education (COE), 3% from the College of Media & Entertainment (CME), and 2% From Walker Library. The participants in our sample represented a wide range of time spent at MTSU. Those within their first five years at MTSU consisted of 27% of responses, and participants ranging from 6-10 years and 20+ years were similar, each consisting of 23% of responses. Remaining responses were from those who had been at MTSU for 11-15 years (19%) and 16-20 years (8%). Finally, the sample mostly consisted of those who identify as women (65%) and men (35%). While it is possible that awareness, involvement, interest, and P&T may differ across demographics, this type of analysis was beyond the scope of this white paper. Providing demographics was for the purpose of providing available information about the diversity of demographics within our particular sample of faculty and staff.

For simplicity within the text, the responses Strongly Agree, Agree, and Somewhat Agree were combined to discuss responses in terms of the percentage of participants who selected a response containing Agree. Strongly Disagree, Disagree, and Somewhat Disagree were combined to discuss responses in terms of the percentage of participants who selected a response containing Disagree.

Awareness

Six items addressed participant awareness of community engagement at MTSU (Figure 4). The resulting responses suggest that over half of our participants are aware of community engagement in scholarship in higher education (63%). About half of our participants are aware of the existence of the Office of Community Engagement and Inclusion at MTSU (49%) as well as the process to designate an MTSU course as “community engaged” through EXL and/or MT Engage (49%). A little over one-third of participants are aware that they can report community partners on Faculty Success (38%) and agree that MTSU has dedicated resources to support faculty and staff community engagement (35%). While there is awareness of community engagement in general, more than half of the most participants are not aware that MTSU has a Community Engagement Carnegie Classification (62%).

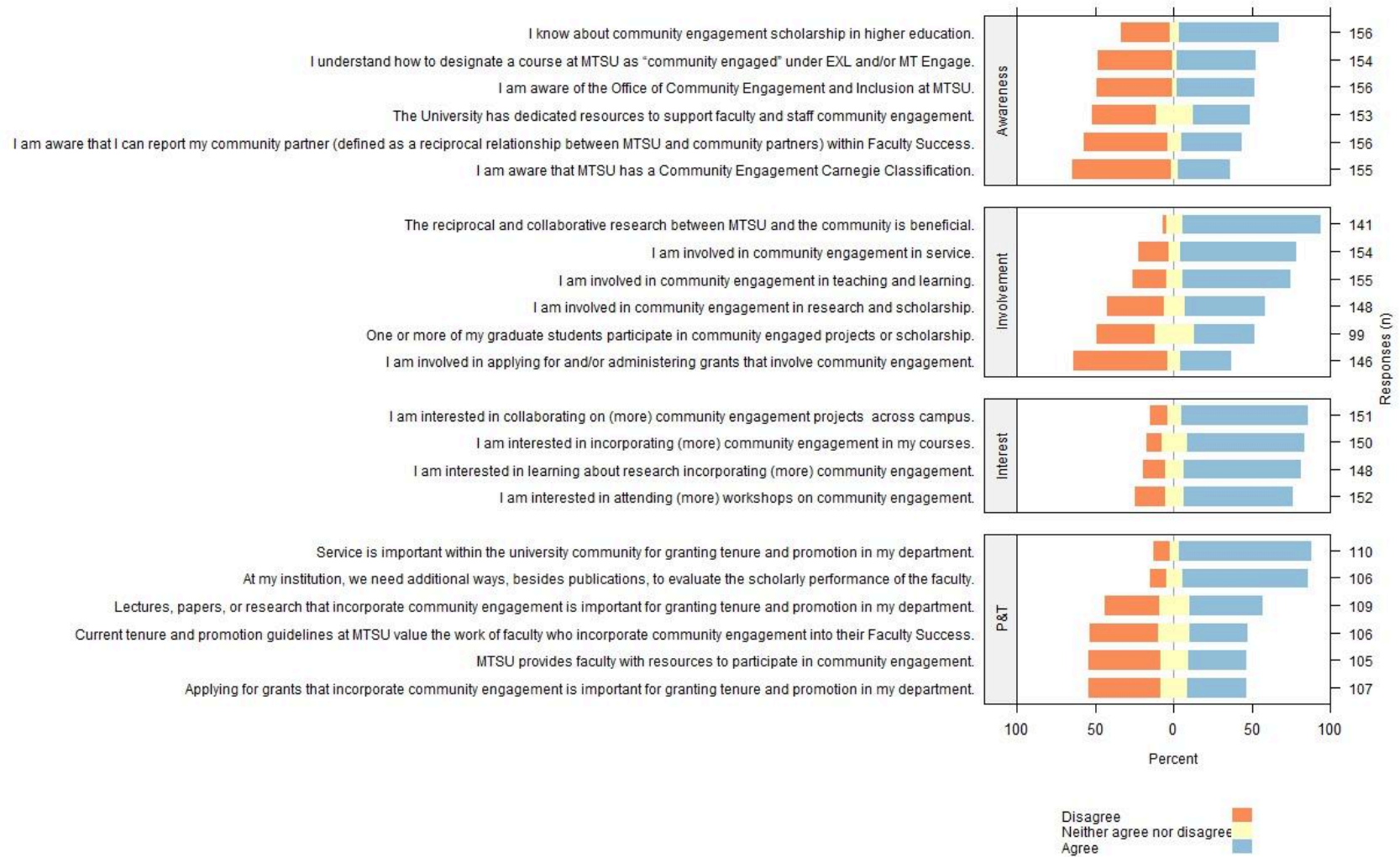


Figure 4. Likert responses ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree per item for the topics of awareness, involvement, and interest relating to community engagement, as well as items relating to promotion and tenure (P&T) relating to community engagement. Any discrepancies in *n* from the total *n* = 156 were due to blank responses or participants selecting “N/A” for the item.

Involvement

Involvement in community engagement was assessed through six items (Figure 4). Almost all participants either agreed (88%) or neither agreed nor disagreed (11%) that the reciprocal and collaborative research between MTSU and the community is beneficial, yet half of participants are involved in community engagement in research and scholarship (51%) and about one-third are involved in applying for and/or administering grants that involve community engagement (32%) or have a graduate student participating in community engaged projects or scholarship (38%). Compared to community engagement through research, over half of participants are involved in community engagement through service (73%) or teaching and learning (68%), suggesting that these may be perceived as more available paths for faculty and staff to participate in community engagement.

Interest

Four items were included to explore participant interest in community engagement (Figure 4). A majority of participants indicated interest in their responses to the four items. This included interest in collaborating on more community engagement projects across campus (80%), incorporating community engagement in courses (74%), learning about research incorporating community engagement (74%), and attending more workshops on community engagement (69%). The high interest of our participants highlights the possibility that lack of awareness of resources may be one barrier to more MTSU faculty and staff participating in community engagement, particularly given the high involvement of participants in community engagement related to service and teaching and less involvement in research and applying for grants involving community engagement.

Promotion and Tenure (P&T)

The six Promotion and Tenure (P&T) items (Figure 4) were only seen by faculty that selected that they were tenured or on the tenure-track ($n = 110$). A majority of our Faculty participants agreed that service is important within the university community for granting tenure and promotion in their

department (84%). This item was not specific to community engagement and suggests that there is a perception that service, in general, is important for P&T. This is compared to only about one-third of participants agreeing that current P&T guidelines at MTSU value the work of Faculty who incorporate community engagement into their Faculty Success (36%). About half of Faculty participants agreed that lectures, papers, or research that incorporate community engagement is important (46%) and about one-third agreed that applying for grants that incorporate community engagement is important (36%) for granting P&T in their department. These results suggest mixed agreement about the perceived importance of community engagement within areas of P&T across our Faculty participants. About one-third of Faculty participants agree that MTSU provides Faculty with resources to participate in community engagement (36%), again highlighting either a lack of awareness of resources available, or a dissatisfaction with resources available. Finally, a majority of participants agree that we need additional ways, besides publications, to evaluate the scholarly performance of the Faculty (79%). Overall, the respondents indicated a need for greater consideration of community engagement activities in P&T policies.

Author's note: For detailed survey results or a copy of the complete survey, please contact Dr. Janet McCormick, Facilitator of the Engaged Scholarship Faculty Work Group.

Recommendations

Recommendations have been proposed based on faculty survey responses and the literature review. These recommendations are segmented into four areas: awareness, involvement, interest, and promotion and tenure.

Awareness

As shown in the survey results, it is possible that the discrepancy in awareness between community engagement in general and the resources that MTSU offers to support community engagement could inhibit MTSU faculty and staff from participating in community engagement.

Therefore, our recommendations are:

- Educate faculty on the Carnegie Community Engagement classification and its importance. This communication should occur at the highest levels such as including it in President McPhee's State of the University, convocation, and in his comments at new faculty/staff orientation, highlighted in MTSU magazines, emails, etc.
- Dedicate more resources to educating faculty and the larger community about Community Engagement. For example, establish an award for CE, create a CE newsletter/magazine or similar publication, showcase CE on social media and the Community and University Partnerships web site, etc.
- Use clear language regarding CE in definitions, mission, strategic plans, and when describing MTSU culture.

Involvement

The survey responses indicated faculty are more involved in CE in their teaching and service and less involved in research and scholarship. MTSU needs to create the infrastructure that supports CE across teaching, research, grants, and service. Therefore, our recommendations are:

- Create a Center for Community Engagement in a centralized location. This Center should:
 - Establish a data bank of current CE work being done
 - Curate CE grant opportunities to share with faculty
 - House an Internship office for the whole University
 - The Center Director should reach out to organizations and build relationships in order to create a list of new and existing community partners (i.e. Meharry) that faculty can search
 - Pair interested faculty with faculty who have successfully engaged in CE projects in a mentoring role

- Prioritize and encourage proposals for FLCs centered on the topic of CE in teaching, research and service.
- LT&ITC regularly offer workshops (2 per semester) on CE – bring in experts, discussion panels, etc.
- If MTSU implements merit pay, include CE as an aspect to be rewarded.

Interest

The survey indicates high faculty interest in learning more about integrating CE in teaching, service and research. MTSU should capitalize on this high level of interest. Therefore, our recommendations are:

- Offer incentives for faculty to change the way they teach and conduct research such as curriculum integration grants, reassigned time for faculty for larger CE projects or course redesign, monetary support for professional development related to CE, etc.
- Provide more information and training about expanding current CE work into other areas such as a service learning project which could benefit from a research grant.

Promotion and Tenure

Overall, the survey respondents indicated a need for greater value placed on community engagement activities in P&T policies. Therefore, our recommendations are:

- A faculty working group should develop and propose consistent language for describing CE in all documents (P&T policy) at all levels (department, college, university) and in all three areas teaching, research/creative activity, and service.
- Faculty involvement in community-engaged projects can touch on each of the three categories of work considered and valued in tenure and promotion—research, teaching, and service. Community-engaged work in each of these areas should be considered as part of the tenure and promotion review.

- Have EXL and MT Engage visit all departments to educate them on their programs and the value of CE for P&T.
- Create a group of “CE experts” who can educate on how to implement and evaluate CE work.
- Offer guidance (ideally offered by the Center) on how to integrate CE in P&T documents.

These suggestions align nicely with those stated previously in the literature review specific to P&T:

- Unequivocally incorporate community-engaged research as a category of scholarly activity
- Offer clear guidelines on the diverse formats of capturing and documenting community-engaged research efforts
- Establish detailed criteria for evaluating the outputs and impacts of engaged scholarship.

Overall, these recommendations underscore our belief that community engagement and community-engaged scholarship are advanced when faculty receive recognition and resources for conducting it.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this white paper reinforces the critical importance of recognizing and promoting engaged scholarship at Middle Tennessee State University. By bridging the gap between theory and practice, engaged scholarship not only enriches the learning experience for students but also fosters meaningful connections between academia and the broader community.

Our working group determined that successful community-engaged research already exists at MTSU although such research is specific to individual faculty and is mostly tolerated as the research and creative activities of already-tenured faculty who are not seeking promotion. In addition, the perceived value of the research itself depends on whether it is funded by state or federal grants. Mentoring programs that expose faculty and provide opportunities for them to participate in this research as

non-PIs are scarce. Some departments have indirectly included community-engaged research in tenure and promotion requirements by not imposing rigid requirements of the research and creative dimension of the tenure or promotion application. To create a vibrant research environment that encourages engaged scholarship within the university and beyond, much work remains.

As administrations and faculty members navigate the evolving landscape of higher education, it is imperative to prioritize and incentivize engaged scholarship. This requires a shift in institutional culture, acknowledging the diverse forms of scholarship that contribute to societal impact. The recommendations outlined in this white paper provide a roadmap for administrators and faculty to embrace and celebrate engaged scholarship, ensuring that it receives the recognition and support it deserves.

Implementing a comprehensive awards and recognition system for engaged scholarship, coupled with clear criteria for promotion and tenure, will serve as powerful motivators for faculty to actively participate in community engagement initiatives. Moreover, fostering a supportive environment through mentorship programs and resource allocation will empower faculty members to excel in both traditional and engaged scholarship endeavors.

In the spirit of creating a holistic and inclusive academic ecosystem, we encourage leveraging existing models and frameworks that celebrate engaged scholarship. By doing so, MTSU can position the University as catalysts for positive change, fostering a sense of purpose and societal relevance among faculty members.

This white paper advocates for a paradigm shift in the evaluation and promotion of engaged scholarship. As academic institutions adapt to the evolving needs of society, embracing and elevating engaged scholarship will not only strengthen the fabric of higher education but also contribute meaningfully to addressing the challenges faced by our communities. By implementing the

recommendations provided, administration and faculty can collectively shape a future where engaged scholarship is not only acknowledged but celebrated as a cornerstone of academic excellence.

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Appendices

Tenure Policy, Middle Tennessee State University. [204 | Middle Tennessee State University \(mtsu.edu\)](#)

Promotion Policy, Middle Tennessee State university. [205 | Middle Tennessee State University \(mtsu.edu\)](#)

Survey