

University of Minnesota
Interim Progress Report
Public Scholarship Committee
Council on Public Engagement
University of Minnesota

April, 2003

Prepared by David Hamilton and Scott McConnell, Committee Co-Chairs

The committee was charged by Ed Fogelman, chair of the Council on Public Engagement:

- To provide a meaning and examples of engaged research and scholarship in different colleges and other units;
- To define engaged inquiry in relation to the norms of disciplinary and professional communities;
- To provide proposals for encouraging engaged research and scholarship within particular units

Based on initial discussions by Committee co-chairs David Hamilton (Vice President for Research and Professor, Genetics, Cell Biology, and Development) and Scott McConnell (Director, Center for Early Education and Development and Professor, Educational Psychology), the Committee's work for this year was organized around three objectives:

1. Define public scholarship. Through discussions with an extended committee, discuss and develop a tentative definition, reflecting both contingencies of a land-grant university and the "public engagement initiative as well as historical traditions of academic freedom and basic research within the academy.
2. Expand the committee to include representatives from the College of Liberal Arts, Institute of Technology, Academic Health Center, and College of Natural Resources.
3. Address questions posed in Dr. Fogelman's charge

Progress to Date

Due to other commitments of the Committee co-chairs (unforeseen at the time they agreed to this assignment), the Public Scholarship Committee of the Council on Public Engagement has not yet convened; we are expecting one or two meetings of the committee during the final months of AY 2002/2003. In preparation for the full Subcommittee's deliberations, Drs. Hamilton and McConnell have met several times, reviewed materials developed by the Public Engagement Initiative and COPE as well as related efforts, and prepared written comments related to the Committee's first task, the definition of public scholarship. This draft definition will be reviewed and revised with the larger Committee, and subsequently with members of the Council on Public Engagement, in the months ahead.

The remainder of this document describes responses organized to this point.

University of Minnesota
Defining Public Scholarship

Any definition of public scholarship must balance both the University's obligation to establish and maintain reciprocal relations with communities, service providing agencies, industries, and civic organizations in Minnesota and the world with the University's core commitments to academic freedom and basic research and cutting-edge scholarship and creation. While the University's commitment to publically engaged scholarship can and must be kept strong, it is also the Committee's firm belief that such engagement must be judged at the level of the institution and not the individual faculty member or academic department. Simply put, the University can and must maximize the extent to which our research meets the letter and spirit of public engagement and public scholarship (as defined below), while at the same time protecting the academy's tradition of unfettered faculty scholarship and creation in a wide range of disciplines and areas.

Casually looking for examples of public engagement at the level of research and scholarship, we notice that they are everywhere in the institution – Public education efforts like the Mini-Med School and Mini-Veterinary School, outreach initiatives like Physics Force and CitySongs, ongoing training and technical assistance in academic departments and professional schools, consultation by and with University faculty and local service agencies or businesses, and on and on. Oftentimes, however, it appears that these tangible and desirable efforts are little-known outside the specific recipients or participants in University efforts. One important part of COPE's work may therefore be to encourage the reporting and celebrating of the many aspects of public scholarship already in place.

Defining "Public Scholarship." At the level of the institution, public scholarship means *optimizing the extent to which University research informs and is informed by the public good, maximizes the generation and transfer of knowledge and technology, educates the public about what research the University does, and listens to the public about what research needs to be done.* This scholarship contributes to the intellectual and social capital of the University and the State (and larger regions), and includes (but is not limited to) the transfer of knowledge and technology that contributes to improved quality of life for significant portions of the populous.

This definition does not assume that "the public" speaks with a single voice, nor that University faculty and staff must respond to every interest present among diverse voices; rather, this definition suggests that significant portions of the University's scholarship will be conducted within the context of ongoing interaction with individuals, organizations, and communities beyond the University campus. Similarly, this definition does not relieve the University of responsibility for providing intellectual and artistic leadership in its work; rather, this definition suggests that University faculty, staff, and students will work, whenever possible, to define and implement research and scholarship that respects and reflects the interests and needs of the broader community. Finally, this definition assumes that the University has an affirmative obligation to inform the public about its work – about what faculty, staff and students do, how they do it, and what it might mean. In this way, the very process of academic scholarship – whether in and of itself "public" – contributes to the intellectual capital of our State.