Engagement Initiatives at Penn State:
A Concept Paper
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At Penn State, engagement includes both curricular (engaged scholarship) and cocurricular (student engagement) activities. Engagement initiatives contribute to students’ intellectual, personal, and social development, and they foster integration into university life, add distinction and value to a Penn State undergraduate experience, and contribute to the continued success of Penn State graduates as citizens and leaders across the state, the nation, and the world.

The University Faculty Senate has taken leadership on the topic of engaged scholarship for undergraduate students. In April 2014, the Senate passed an Advisory/Consultative Report that was put forward by a partnership of nine standing committees. This report gave the University guidance on how it should proceed with the Engaged Scholarship Initiative.1 Soon after taking office, President Barron endorsed this report. President Barron’s focus on student engagement as one of his six imperatives has advanced much dialogue, activity and expectations across many units of the University.

It is important, however, to consider that promoting student engagement is not an isolated initiative involving students, but also includes faculty, staff, and various external constituencies. Thus, advancing the student engagement initiative must allow a holistic consideration of its impact and its rationale within the foundation of the institution’s mission, as well as its coordinated integration into the broader external community.

This initiative is an effort coordinated by Undergraduate Education, Student Affairs, and Outreach and Online Education. Consistent with the University Strategic Plan, Global Programs is a key partner in providing engagement opportunities for students. The two broad categories are defined as follows:

Engaged Scholarship (curricular)

Engaged scholarship involves out-of-class academic experiences, both on campus and off-campus -- domestic and international, that complement in-course learning. These experiences provide students with an opportunity to put into practice what they learn in the classroom, and are typically completed with guidance from a faculty or staff member who has expertise in a particular discipline.

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1 See: Senate Committees on Curricular Affairs, Educational Equity and Campus Environment, Faculty Affairs, Global Programs, Outreach, Research, Student Life, Undergraduate Education, and University Planning (2015) Engaged Scholarship Report, April 29 (Appendix G).
Pending Faculty Senate approval, all Penn State students will complete an engaged scholarship activity as a graduation requirement, beginning with the incoming class of 2016. These include:

- Undergraduate research, artworks or performances
- Internships or cooperative education
- Study abroad, study away, embedded travel courses
- Service-learning and community-based learning, and
- Capstone courses or projects which may have an outreach component or emphasis

Student Engagement (co-curricular)

Student engagement involves co-curricular experiences that contribute to student learning but are not necessarily connected to explicit goals or objectives of the academic curriculum. Such experiences occur on and off campus, are anchored in the University, and may be led by faculty, staff, and students. The learning that occurs through such involvement transforms students' experiences and enhances the knowledge, skills and abilities, and global awareness that allow Penn State graduates to be prepared for the next steps in their lives.

Students are engaged in Penn State life in many diverse and important ways. The transformative value of such experiences is based upon the depth of involvement and ranges from holding leadership roles in student organizations, membership in or attendance at student organization or other events on campus, to lending their talents in ways that enrich the lives and experiences of others. These include, but are not limited to:

- Student government leadership
- Entrepreneurship activities
- Student organization leadership
- Civic involvement
- Cultural organizations and/or events
- Volunteerism both on and off-campus
- Mentoring and peer leadership
- Philanthropic activities
- Music, theater, and art performances and exhibits
Implementation

A Penn State Network for Student Engagement is proposed, comprised of four essential elements. Three are organizational: (1) the Engagement Hub, to serve as a resource for students to identify and learn about engagement opportunities; (2) the Community Engagement Connection, and (3) the Academy for Engaged Scholarship.

The budgetary support for staffing and operations associated with these will need to be leveraged with university funding and within the current budget and staffing from Student Affairs, Undergraduate Education, and Outreach and Online Learning.

A final component is endowment support for direct funding of students, expanding their ability and opportunity to participate in engagement activities.

Engagement Hub

Engagement opportunities need to be organized in a way that makes them visible to the Penn State community. Students need to be aware of the experiences they may pursue, and faculty and staff should have support to create, participate in, and lead these experiences.

The Engagement Hub will be housed in the Hetzel Union Building (HUB-Robeson Center). This location is central to many activities for University Park students, and it has technological tools to connect virtually to students at any campus location, including the World Campus.

Community Engagement Connection

Embedded in: The Engagement Hub, the Community Engagement Connection, will identify, foster, and coordinate external opportunities for all types of student engagement. To support the advancement of engagement opportunities with all types of communities (e.g., global, urban, private sector; non-profits, schools, towns, etc.), the proposed Community Engagement Connection, will work with the colleges, campuses, Global Programs, Extension and Outreach and Online Education to identify, scale, coordinate, and align engagement opportunities with the interests and priorities of faculty and students.
Academy for Engaged Scholarship

The Academy for Engaged Scholarship will be housed in the Network for Student Engagement. The Academy will foster faculty research and development by hosting scholars-in-residence who will conduct research, develop new engagement offerings, and/or lead faculty development initiatives.

At least two faculty scholars will be selected by the Academy each academic year, and their work will be reported out to the broader community through Network publications, an annual conference on engagement, and national conferences (where appropriate and available). The process to identify the faculty scholars will be coordinated by the Network leadership. Research and professional development activities will be included in the Network's publications.

Operations and Support

The organization and staffing of the Network will continue the productive collaboration among the initiatives' key administrative sponsors—Undergraduate Education, Student Affairs and Outreach and Online Education.

Jacqueline Edmondson (Associate Vice President and Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education) will lead and coordinate activities for the Network for Student Engagement, in collaboration with Student Affairs and Outreach and Online Education. Edmondson will facilitate university-wide faculty and staff discussions about student engagement, coordinate with the University Faculty Senate, and foster connections to student and community organizations. She will provide leadership for the Academy for Engaged Scholarship, develop an assessment plan for the Network's activities, and oversee the operations and budget of the Network.

The Senior Director for Student Engagement Programs in Student Affairs (currently vacant) will lead the student engagement efforts of the Network. This includes overseeing the development of The Engagement Hub, to include the creation of a student engagement portal and inventory of engagement opportunities; supervising the Network Coordinator (see below); the organization and administration of a Student Engagement Society; and administration of the Engaged Scholarship Grants and Student Engagement Travel Fund.
Richard Smith (Director of Community Engagement) will provide support for the Community Engagement Connection, funded through Outreach and Online Education.

A Coordinator (Student Services Associate 2) will be hired to support the Network. The coordinator will be responsible for managing the Engagement Hub, updating and maintaining the student engagement portal, supervising the student interns, and assisting the Associate Vice President and Associate Dean and the Senior Director of Student Engagement with projects.

An Administrative Support Assistant will be hired to provide administrative support to the network. Responsibilities will include administering the Network budget, scheduling meetings, arranging Advisory Board meetings, and providing support to other Network staff and faculty scholars.

The Communications Director for Undergraduate Education will coordinate communications for the Network, including social media and the website. The communications director will oversee disseminating information about the various activities in which students engage, the impact they are having, and ways in which their efforts connect to national and international projects. She will also assist in updating the inventory of faculty research projects in which undergraduates can become involved and uploading into the Engagement Hub.

Student Interns will assist in communications with and outreach to students about various engagement opportunities and help to staff The Engagement Hub. They will also assist with special projects and initiatives where appropriate.

A Graduate Student Research Assistant will provide research support to the Academy for Engaged Scholarship and assist with program assessments.

Network staff will work in collaboration with University development offices to establish and administer an endowment to support students in their engagement activities. Such support would provide funding in-lieu of earnings otherwise realized on summer or part-time jobs, assistance with travel costs related to their engagement, and help with expenses incurred in attending conferences or other events to present and showcase their work.