

Public Abstract

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Higher education serves public needs and influences society through teaching, research, and service. An increasingly important component in fulfilling this mission has been community engagement. In this research study, the boundary spanning theory was used to determine ways state colleges and universities engage with the larger community to influence the cultural and social development of the region. Internal and external stakeholders at three case study sites were interviewed to determine their perceptions on the influence of community engagement on the region, how these institutions can become involved to further the cultural and social development of the region, and what policies and procedures are needed to encourage community engagement. Five major findings emerged from this research study. First, community engagement has a reciprocal effect in that the university influences and is influenced by regional characteristics and needs. Secondly, the most successful community engagement activities were based on strong individual relationships and were focused on student learning. Thirdly, further community engagement activities need to reach out to underserved populations to further influence regional development. Fourth, university policies and procedures, particularly in hiring, promotion, tenure, and resource allocation, were needed to create a community engaged institution. Finally, the organizational structure and external interface should provide an easily accessible bridge between the university and the community. This analysis of the similarities and differences in each university's approach to community engagement will be beneficial to any regional comprehensive university as it seeks to enhance and expand its community engagement efforts. In addition, the results of this research study offer a more complete understanding of broader theories relating to community engagement.