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Moving Forward with Carnegie

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From the Associate Editor

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In January 2020, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching announced the recipients of the most recent cycle of the elective Community Engagement Classification. A total of 359 institutions now hold this prestigious designation that celebrates the purpose of community engagement as "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" (https://www.brown.edu/swearer/carnegie/about).

Congratulations to all institutions that received the designation, and especially everyone at those institutions who worked so hard to earn the recognition. As anyone who has been intimately involved in the process knows, it takes a lot of hard work to coordinate the effort of applying to Carnegie in order to demonstrate a commitment to authentically engaging with community partners. These campus leaders should take the time to celebrate and engage in some well-deserved self-care.

But then it's time to take a deep breath and dive back in with renewed enthusiasm. Earning the classification is certainly worthy of celebration, but in reality, we are doing a disservice to our communities, students, and colleagues if we treat this announcement as though we are simply crossing a finish line; institutions with this perspective are destined to be one-time designees. Rather, the Community Engagement Classification should be treated as a launching point. The process of applying for Carnegie should be an exercise in self-assessment that identifies areas of strength and opportunities for continued growth. Carnegie provides us with the opportunity to intentionally direct institutional resources and focus momentum to further centralize community engagement to our missions. This way, as our students, communities, and institutions evolve, we can ensure that our community engagement work is responsive to those changes and remains relevant.

Since the announcement of the first cohort of Carnegie Community Engagement institutions in 2006, a lot has been written about the classification. For example, an entire edition of *New Directions for Higher Education* was dedicated to the lessons learned from the first wave of Carnegie Community Engagement institutions (Sandmann, Thornton, & Jaeger, 2009), and a comprehensive guide to applying for the designation has been developed (Saltmarsh & Johnson, 2018). Others have reflected on the intentions, process, and impact of the classification (e.g., Driscoll, 2008; 2014; Zuiches, 2010). A relatively new endeavor is going to continue to increase what we can learn about community/university engagement in U.S. higher education.

Since 2017, Brown University's Swearer Center for Public Service has served as the administrative home for the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification. This move is a part of the Swearer Center-hosted College and University Engagement Initiative, which has the stated goal of "[contributing] to the fields of community engagement and social innovation through collaboration with students, faculty, community partners, institutions of higher education and networks for community engagement and social innovation" (https://www.brown.edu/swearer/about). Due to a commitment to advancing the field and a tremendous amount of work on the part of the team at the Swearer Center, the entire Carnegie Community Engagement Classification dataset is now open access and freely available to researchers. The Swearer Center especially encourages graduate students and junior scholars to utilize the data, citing the high costs often associated with gaining access to datasets in higher education. The Swearer Center should be applauded for their efforts—this move is likely to

bring attention to an understudied area of research and demonstrate to graduate students and early career scholars that there is a tremendous amount of ground to be broken. I am hopeful that one area of continued exploration will be developing a better understanding of why institutions decide to apply for the designation, and how they leverage the designation to further institutionalize community engagement on their campuses.

For example, according to the press release from the Swearer Center, 119 institutions received the classification as a part of the 2020 cycle, 44 of which received the classification for the first time, and 75 of which were re-designated. Interestingly, of the 121 institutions that received the designation in the 2010 cycle and were required to re-apply to maintain the classification, 44 of those institutions (~36%) chose not to pursue reclassification. Contrast this to the 2015 cycle, when 188 institutions were required to reclassify, and only 26 chose not to do so (~14%). Another disparity between the 2015 and 2020 cycles is the success rate for first-time applicants. In 2015, 83 of the 133 first-time applicants received the classification (~62%), while in 2020, only 44 of the 109 first-time applicants received the classification (~40%). Certainly there are any number of factors that may have led to these, and likely many other, disparities between classification cycles, all of which can be explored through theoretically grounded research questions and explored empirically, at least in part, through this newly available dataset.

This insight will be invaluable to those leading the efforts to receive the Carnegie Classification in the future. The more we are able to be clear-eyed about the purposes of Carnegie, how community engagement is prioritized on our respective campuses, and what it takes to earn and leverage the Carnegie classification, the more effective we can be in our work, and the better we can co-create with our community partners and students.

References

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