# Outreach Activities as an Integral Part of Promotion and Tenure

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Abstract

Faculty members are expected to serve their department, their college, their university, their discipline, and society at-large – *while at the same time* – teaching high quality courses, and performing original, ground-breaking research that will lead to substantial external funding sources that will flow into the university. While this superman or superwoman may exist on some university campuses, it may be more realistic to envision a model where a department or a college has a mix of faculty members who – *as a group* – endeavor to achieve the high standards set by and for the university. In alignment with Boyer (1996) [1] and Glassick, et al. (1997)[6], creative activities and research should be more broadly defined using scholarship to allow for engagement of both students and faculty members. In order to meet the demands of competing (*and oftentimes conflicting*) requirements, an expanded definition of Service, Research or Creative Activity, and Teaching must be considered to include Service-Learning or *Outreach* opportunities to enhance the value of the faculty member's contributions to their chosen discipline. It is critically important to define how *Outreach Activities* (OA*)* can be used to feed and nurture the traditional P&T criteria in one or more of the primary categories.

This paper will provide a working definition of *Outreach Activities*, in the context of Engineering and Technology disciplines. The authors will address the value-added role that Outreach Activities could play within a junior faculty member's P&T portfolio. Furthermore, a model will be described wherein faculty members could collaborate with industry representatives, government officials, and/or professional societies to define and enhance outreach opportunities for students and faculty. The proposed model could provide significant benefits to industry sponsors who participate in the model, to faculty members and students within the university system, and to the local economy where participating businesses and employees were located.

Introduction

Promotion and Tenure (P&T) at most four year universities in the United States focuses on three central themes: Teaching, Research (*or Creative Activity*), and Service. The ratio of each category is typically established during the annual performance plan discussion which is generally held between the faculty member and the department chair *or in some cases with the College Dean*. The cumulative body of work is reviewed by the P&T committee when the faculty member submits their promotion and tenure portfolio for evaluation and assessment. Interim accomplishments may also be reviewed on a recurring basis, depending on the structure of the P&T process within the organization. The Teaching category is well understood and is marked by classroom productivity metrics and performance assessments by the chair, by academic colleagues (*peer evaluations*), and oftentimes includes students in the form of student opinion surveys. Research or Creative Activity is also fairly well defined within a given

academic discipline although a wide variety of performance metrics may be used to define the expected levels and quality of the research contributions by faculty members across a given campus or university system. The Service category is one that often leaves faculty members – especially junior faculty members – with a false sense of security as they continue to build their academic portfolio. Many new faculty members believe that if they serve the department, the college, the university, the discipline, and society at-large, then they will succeed when it comes to their promotion and tenure process. As many prospective faculty members have found, this will most likely not be the case in many instances.

Sandmann (2008)[11] supported the notion that redefining faculty engagement and differences among various categories of service, outreach, and engagement would help move the discussions of outreach – as an essential component of promotion and tenure – in the right direction. The overall goal is to better prepare faculty for accepting outreach activities for Promotion and Tenure. *Outreach Activities* as used in this context are activities that may involve students, faculty members, student organizations, business leaders, professional organizations, administrators, or any combination thereof. These activities are designed to create and support university-recognized projects that have been encouraged – if not officially sanctioned – by college or departmental administrators to encourage faculty members to participate in external activities leading to community involvement, economic development, and process improvements across the region.

This outreach approach differs from the traditional grant-funded research activities normally associated with the research component of Promotion, Retention, and Tenure (PTR). In the traditional research component, funded grant activities, publication in archival journals, and laboratory-centered research activities are considered the norm for a faculty member. In the outreach activities described in this paper a participating faculty member may or may receive funding from the sponsor who agrees to provide support to the students and to the faculty members in support of the regional or local outreach activities. Grant-sponsored research often requires project activities leading to national or international recognition and influence, whereas the service-centered outreach activities discussed here are most often local or regional-sponsored activities.

> Many public scholars—perhaps most of them—organize their scholarship, creative practice, and teaching around projects. A project is carried out by a purpose-built team organized for a finite period of time in order to bring about specific results or to create particular events or resources. One way of making promotion review more coherent for administrators and individual faculty members is to review projects in a holistic fashion.
>
> Tenure and promotion policies need to be responsive to the project as the molecular structure of public scholarship and creative practice. Project-friendly policies should not use national and international scope to define intellectual

quality, for example. Academic endeavor that is local or regional in focus has equal claims to complexity, creativity, and rigor. Project management and leadership, the design of new programs and curricula, and the public presentation of knowledge—all may flow from project-based academic work. It is definitely challenging to evaluate the scholarly excellence of integrative projects that combine inquiry and discovery with teaching and service. But it has to happen. (Ellison & Eaton, 2008, p. 8)[2]

The primary goal of *Outreach Activities* in this context is to provide assistance to local (or regional) organizations/businesses in the form of student semester projects, capstone course projects, professional consulting, and/or advisory services to enhance and improve the functionality of the organization and to improve its products and services. For faculty members who take on the challenge of creating an outreach activity such as those within the categories above, their PTR documentation must ultimately demonstrate a contribution to the discipline, similar to the funded research projects that they may pursue. In order for this objective to be realized within the Engineering and Technology disciplines, several benefits must be reinforced, based on individual efforts.

Complementary roles of outreach activities for engineering and technology programs

Based on the technical skill sets of faculty members and students in the program, engineering and technology programs at four-year universities are well-suited to provide technical assistance to local business leaders and to service organizations. With continuing and immediate access to students enrolled in technology-centric programs, faculty members are uniquely positioned to work with industry sponsors to help them assess their issues and to develop low-cost, short-term solutions to their problems. Students who are actively engaged in learning the requisite tools and techniques associated with their chosen discipline are well-suited to short-term assessments of a customer's issues as they also fulfill an academic program requirement within the classroom. The students bring a fresh perspective to the organization and the organization provides real-world experience to the students which better prepares them for entry-level professional assignments once they complete their degree programs.

> Three community partners, experienced with and engaged in partnerships between universities and communities with varying challenges of success and failure, examine the specific challenge of review, promotion, and tenure for community-engaged faculty and its impact on the community. They explain how retaining and valuing community-engaged faculty who can both represent the academy to the community and bring the community into the academy are essential to helping secure the common good. (Freeman, Gust, & Aloshen, 2009, p.88)[3]

The faculty member, the student team, and the sponsor generally form a symbiotic relationship that also improves the sponsor's operation over time. This relationship also helps build

confidence in the quality of the students in the program and in the academic program overall. Once this symbiotic relationship is developed among the participants, long-range benefits can accrue for the industry sponsors and to the university as a whole. Some of these benefits include: 1) enhanced experiences for students who will become actively involved in their chosen discipline upon graduation, 2) improved relationships between faculty members and their professional counterparts in industry, 3) opportunities to pursue cost-effective investments in the program via scholarships, internships, grants, and donations of cash or equipment that will lead to future program enhancements and job opportunities for the students, 4) adding value to the formal education held by faculty members and to their students when dealing with real-world, real-time situations, 5) increased visibility of the university as a partner with industry in building upon the economic foundation within the region, and 6) increased recognition of the local industrial members as partners in education with the university. These activities must be recognized for the benefit of all stakeholders and for the scholarship and service which may result.

Candidate opportunities to enhance outreach activities

The value-added role that *Outreach Activities* could satisfy for a junior faculty member's Promotion and Tenure (P&T) process might be defined as a mix between the traditional research elements of their portfolio and the service elements. Several key components must be addressed if the *Outreach Activities* are to be recognized by senior faculty members who sit on the promotion and tenure committees within the university. These senior faculty members within an institution must first acknowledge the benefits to the discipline and to the individual before the junior faculty member decides to include *Outreach Activities* as an element of their annual performance review model. There are a variety of issues involved in evaluating outreach activities as part of a faculty member's academic portfolio. An example of a primary issue in this domain is cited by Glass, Doberneck, & Schweitzer (2011)[5]: "With no standard language to describe publicly engaged scholarship, the researchers had to consider the context in which the types of publicly engaged scholarship were reported on the promotion and tenure documents" (p. 11).

Proposed model for integrating outreach activities into the promotion and tenure process

The fundamental definition of research must first be expanded to integrate the more inclusive term of *Research and Creative Activity*. Many universities have already adopted this expanded definition to help capture a faculty member's true contribution to their professional discipline. It is possible that traditional funded grants and publication activities in archival journals may now be too restrictive a metric for next generation faculty members.
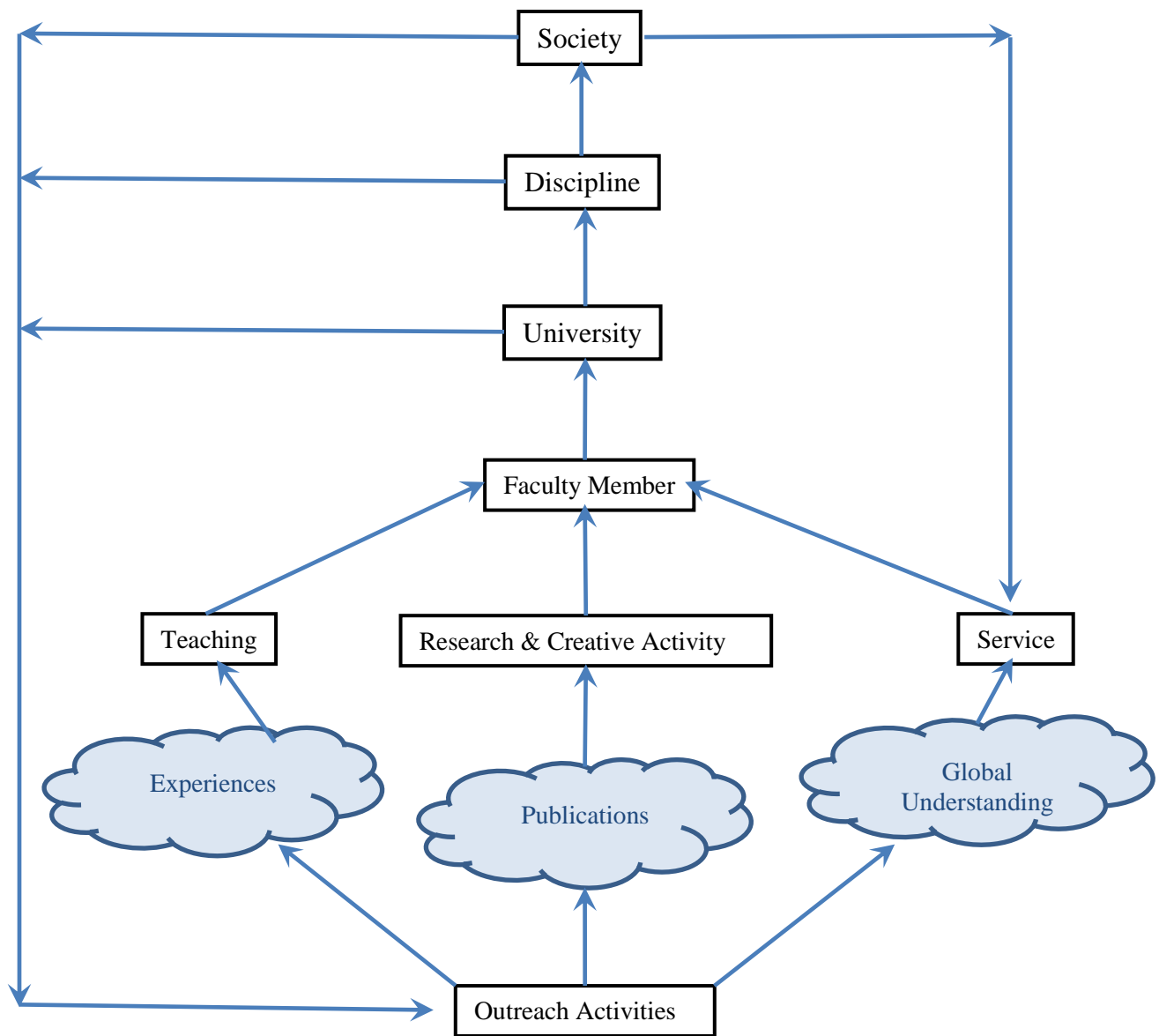
Figure 1. The J2 Model – Integrating Outreach Activities into the Promotion and Tenure Process

When comparing the type and breadth of technologies available to upcoming generations of faculty members in academia to those traditionally used to define contributions to the industry, new metrics must also be considered that align with the emerging industrial trends in a global environment. The adoption of this expanded definition does not advocate the elimination of the traditional metrics of performance; rather it proposes a system that takes advantage of outreach as an essential element within a college's or a department's mission today to better prepare students for a productive career. Using the J2 Model, Promotion and Tenure Committee Members would be able to clearly assess the faculty member's contributions with one of the three recognized academic portfolio categories without having to create a stand-alone (i.e. fourth) category to integrate OA into the mix. The current P&T review and assessment processes would remain effectively unchanged.

By using Outreach Activities (OA) as a resource to enhance a faculty member's level of understanding and subject matter expertise, OA can be used to support and enhance all three categories within the faculty member's academic portfolio, as shown in Figure 1. If industrial experience is the primary output derived from the outreach activity, then the Teaching Category would be the appropriate category to document the results of the OA experience. If the OA resulted in high quality publications in one or more peer-reviewed academic journals, then the Research and Creative Activity category would be an appropriate contribution to the faculty member's academic portfolio. If the OA was not directly related to one's discipline or if the experience did not substantially add to the faculty member's current industrial experience base then the Service Category would be the most relevant area where the OA experience should be documented.

Within this expanded definition, the individual faculty member and his/her colleagues will benefit from a more inclusive model of performance measurement and professional growth within the discipline. Having said that, however, there is still a need to document the results of the various *Outreach Activities* and then to publish them in relevant discipline-specific publications so others across the discipline may learn from colleagues what works and what does not seem to work as well. Some faculty members will be very adept at creating, managing, and growing *Outreach Activities* within their organization while other faculty members will not. It remains the task of the Department Chairperson to balance the performance and accomplishments of his/her department by optimizing the various skill sets that individual faculty members bring to the table.

This "balancing act" is part of the missing link when faculty members come before a promotion and tenure review board. For example, teamwork is strongly encouraged among the faculty, including: authoring joint publications, serving as a Co-Principal Investigator (Co-PI) on research grants, and serving on committees at all levels of the university. However, when the individual faculty member presents his/her portfolio to the Promotion and/or Tenure Committees, group efforts are largely discounted in favor of individual accomplishments. This dichotomy creates a great deal of stress and consternation among junior faculty members throughout their formative, tenure-track years. The desire to work within a well-defined, ***highly objective*** set of promotion and tenure criteria through which the faculty members can manage and match their career progress to the stated requirements is most often a missing element within the structure of the organization. This hidden process leaves the candidate with a very uneasy feeling about his/her levels of performance under a ***highly subjective***, arbitrary selection process.

One essential element of including ***Outreach Activities*** as an appropriate component of a faculty member's performance portfolio could be the open and frank dialogue that would help clarify and standardize the promotion process for future generations of faculty members.

Summary and conclusion

Several different *Outreach Activities* models are compatible with the goals and aspirations of individual faculty members and with the university administrators who are charged to support the mission and vision of the organization. The authors have described a basic concept for *Outreach Activities* wherein most faculty members could collaborate with industry representatives, government officials, and/or professional societies to define and enhance outreach opportunities for students and faculty. The J2 Model for Integrating Outreach Activities into the Promotion and Tenure Process was also introduced to provide a common approach as OA and P&T requirements are addressed in a modern university setting. The role of these expanded performance metrics needs to be fully integrated into the annual evaluation process. The performance expectations for faculty members who choose to integrate OA models into their individual academic portfolios must also address the various promotion and tenure committee processes at different stages in a faculty member's development. These processes should include integrated discipline-specific *Outreach Activities* within the faculty member's annual productivity plan thus providing significant benefits to the faculty member, to his/her students, to the industry sponsors who support the process, and to the local economies where participating workforce members live and work.

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