Embracing “Other” Forms of Sponsored Activity: Leadership Perspectives on Building Research Capacity at WMU

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Embracing “Other” Forms of Sponsored Activity: Leadership Perspectives on Building Research Capacity at WMU

Kathy Purnell, Office of the VP for Research

The Project: Leadership Conversations on Research

Rationale: This Academic Leadership Academy Project had the following goals:

- To explore leadership perspectives on "research"
- To help raise awareness of Carnegie Classification metrics regarding "research activity"
- To identify key investments academic leadership deemed essential to advance WMU's standing as a research institution.
- To raise awareness of regulatory definitions of sponsored activity
- To explore initiatives that deans, directors and chairs would be willing to lead, on behalf of their units, in order to advance WMU’s standing as a research institution.

Method: 10 face-to-face conversations of about 60-90 minutes in duration.

Participants: All 10 participants were current or former deans, directors or department chairs.

The discussion questions

A. Exploring Views on Research

- What does the term ‘Research’ mean to you?
- What does the term ‘Research University’ mean to you?
- Based on the Carnegie criteria to determine an institution’s level of research activity and your views on research, what investments do you feel are critical to advance WMU’s standing as a research university?

B. Exploring Opportunities “Other” Sponsored Activity Affords to Build Institutional Research Capacity

- As a dean/director/chair, if you were asked today to lead one sponsored project initiative on behalf of your unit to enhance WMU’s standing as a research institution, what would that initiative be?
- What would be your primary concern(s) about serving in this role on behalf of your unit?

Carnegie Classifications on “Research Activity”

The Carnegie classification criteria for research institutions has a methodology which examines the following items to determine the “level of research activity” which occurs at an institution:

- Research & development expenditures in science and engineering
- Research & development expenditures in non-Science and Engineering fields
- Science & Engineering research staff (postdoctoral appointees and other non-faculty research staff with doctorates)
- Doctoral conferrals in humanities fields, social science, STEM and other fields

Federal regulations on institutional functions and sponsored activities

Major Functions of an Academic Institution

- Instruction means the teaching and training activities of an institution.
- Sponsored instruction and training means specific instruction or training activity established by grant, contract, or cooperative agreement. The purposes of the cost principles. This activity may be considered a major function even though an institution's accounting treatment may include it in the instruction function, per the note below.

- Research means research, development and scholarly activities that are not organized research.
- Development means research and development activities that are not sponsored by Federal and non-Federal entities.
- Teaching means teaching activities of institutions in research training programs that are not organized research.

Other sponsored activities includes programs and projects funded by Federal and non-Federal agencies and organizations which involve the performance of work other than instruction and organized research.

- Other sponsored activities includes activities that are separate budgeted and accounted for by the institution under an internal administrative category. University research for purposes of this document, must be combined with sponsored research under the function of research.

Common university interpretations – Other Sponsored activity

“Other Sponsored Activity” may include:

- Travel grants
- Support for conferences or seminars
- Support for University programs
- Support for students, staff, or teachers in elementary or secondary schools, or the general public, through outreach-related activities
- Projects that involve faculty, staff, or students in community service activities (where the students are not receiving academic credit for their involvement)
- Support for projects pertaining to library collections and archives and acquisitions
- Programs to enhance institutional resources, including data center expansion, computer enhancements, and many more...

What would you lead on behalf of your peers, our community?

Proposed initiatives to build our research culture and capacity & concerns

- Secure funding to expand the capacity of the department to engage nonprofits and the regional public sector through joint development of databases to facilitate evaluation, system analyses, as well as training and other networking events to facilitate joint program development and grantwriting.
- A comprehensive “University Audit” of its structure to assess its capacity to support civic engagement, leverage public private partnerships and expand investments in graduate education.
- Training grants to invest in students for professional development, network, and skill building beyond the curriculum.
- Collaboration with the City of Kalamazoo on a “Smart Cities” initiative.
- Collaboration to unite “splintered collections” where WMU has a component virtual and traveling resources to advance knowledge of historical figures (WMU partnering with Howard and Harvard collections on Merze Tate)
- Sponsorship of a college-wide conference showcasing WMU strengths in automotive research and technical services
- A partnership summit to invite 4-5 high school students from every county in Michigan to come to campus to learn about health professions, explore programs at WMU and encourage participating students to learn about health equity issues in collaboration with faculty, staff and RSOs.
- Support for advanced fellowships in the Humanities (“Society of fellows”)
- Support to K-12 professionals, Geography, Political Science and History faculty and students to examine best practices in civic instruction

Next steps & acknowledgments

Next steps: All 10 participants identified actionable initiatives in the form of either possible grant or contract proposals, or partnerships that could be leveraged to develop their leadership sponsored projects. OVPR is currently researching and developing a plan and list of potential sponsors for the proposed activities.

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Interested in developing an initiative? Feedback?

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