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12. EVOLUTION, NOT REVOLUTION

Building the Engagement Function One Asset at a Time

This chapter reprises an address to the 9th International Workshop on Higher Education Reform, held at the University of Pittsburgh on 10-12 October 2012. Since the address was billed as a keynote, readers might reasonably expect a discourse on expanding the university's core mission: incorporating engagement either as a stand-alone function or as an increasingly critical contribution to the typical mission categories of research, instruction, and public service. With apologies to those awaiting inspiration, the address in fact focused on the nuts and bolts issues related to developing an engagement organization, getting that organization off the ground, and practicing engagement in a traditional four-year regional public university.

Moving beyond the start-up issues discussed in Pittsburgh, this chapter incorporates examples of engagement successes, requisites for engagement sustainability, and some consideration of international collaboration; but it begins, as did the address, by identifying the critical organizational components underlying the engagement function. Doing this, in any institution, requires a clear sense of the institution's footprint or area of responsibility beyond the campus; some thoughts on the units, people, and initiatives that you can bring to the table; and some sense of what can reasonably be accomplished in a manageable time frame. What follows describes that process as it has played out over the past decade at one institution, Northern Illinois University (NIU) in DeKalb, Illinois.

NIU'S REGION: (1) THE CHICAGO METRO AREA

As Americans will know, but international readers may not, Illinois is a centrally located, mid-western state with easy access to two of the country's major waterways, the Great Lakes and the Mississippi River, and one of the world's busiest airports, O'Hare International. The northern Illinois region, which NIU serves, comprises the top quarter of the state and contains about 80 percent of the state's population and 90 percent of its industry and business. Interstate highways and railroads crisscross the region, thus constituting a transportation hub for travel by land, sea, or air.

DeKalb, home to Northern Illinois University, is 65 miles west of Chicago, one of the world's major culture centers and a genuinely global city by almost any measure. Indeed, Chicago has been recognized as one of the top ten economic centers worldwide by Standard & Poor's; as first in the hemisphere for Best Economic Potential, Best Infrastructure, and Best Development and Investment

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Promotion by Foreign Direct Investment (fDi Magazine); and second among US cities in global network connectivity (Chicago Council 2007, p. 10). The Chicago Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) includes a population of over 10 million and is now the third most populous area in the United States. Rankings of global cities typically put Chicago near the top, in the company of New York City, London, Paris, Tokyo, Frankfurt, Hong Kong, Los Angeles, Milan, and Singapore (Chicago Council 2007).

Chicago's influence on the surrounding region can hardly be overestimated. The city anchors the region, defines it in the minds of many, and certainly makes northern Illinois a very good place for a regional institution to be located. Of course, the region is also home to top-quality private institutions, many small private colleges, 26 two-year community colleges, and branch campuses from institutions across the country (Figure 12.1).



Figure 12.1 Location of Northern Illinois University within the United States

The region's appeal to higher educational institutions has resulted in a lot of competition in the higher education sector for students, economic development opportunities, grants, and contracts; but this appeal has also bolstered the region's attractiveness to the people whom Richard Florida (2002, pp. 68-72) calls the "creative class," the country's knowledge workers and problem solvers. For an institution attempting to develop or to expand an engagement function, creative class people can be excellent partners, and a knowledge economy requires the kind of sustained infusion of highly skilled workers which universities should be able to provide.

NIU'S REGION: (2) MANUFACTURING TOWNS AND RURAL COMMUNITIES

NIU's service area, however, covers the whole of northern Illinois, not just the metropolitan and suburban east end. Rockford, a city of 150,000, located north of DeKalb, incorporates every aspect of the urban areas which define the American rust belt. Historically dependent on its manufacturing base, the city has struggled through the economic changes of the past twenty years and is now home to an increasingly diverse population with an annual per capita income of US\$21,895 compared to the state average of US\$29,376,¹ an income differential attributable in large measure to a baccalaureate educational attainment level which is 9.6 percent below the state average² (U.S. Census Bureau 2012). Rockford can point to a notable aerospace cluster that is moving away from manufacturing and toward design and testing. That cluster has attracted an unusual number of engineers and technology personnel, but these people are easily recruited away to the more prosperous areas to the east, areas where those with children find public school systems that meet their professional expectations. Two comparable-sized cities with similar manufacturing histories and contemporary urban problems, Aurora and Elgin, rest on the edge of Chicago's populous western suburbs, closer to NIU.

Moving further west towards the Mississippi, the landscape changes again. Northwestern Illinois can claim some of the richest farm land in the world, but this territory is dotted with very poor communities, old towns with declining populations, and high concentrations of elderly people who grew up there and probably will never leave. With greatly reduced earnings from manufacturing centers and very little high-paying employment, these communities struggle with an associated inability to retain working-age residents and a parallel inability to support high-quality public school systems for the children of those who remain. This then is the region with which Northern Illinois University has historically been associated, an association recognized by the Illinois Board of Higher Education in its 2003 compilation (for master planning purposes) of the distinctive strengths and characteristic of each of the state's public universities. At that time, the Board described NIU as follows:

Located in a region that includes the north and western Chicago suburbs and the city of Rockford, Northern Illinois University has become a major resource for this emerging metropolitan area. Once primarily rural and agricultural, the University's service region is increasingly complex and cosmopolitan, experiencing rapid population and economic growth. The University's undergraduate students are primarily traditional college-aged. While many students select a residential baccalaureate experience, others transfer to Northern from community colleges, and an increasing number commute for their entire academic program while maintaining employment and family obligations. At the graduate level, a substantial number of the University's students are working adults who enroll on a part-time basis. In addition to pursuing statewide goals and priorities, Northern Illinois University:

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- Provides a full range of liberal arts and professional undergraduate programs;
- Offers master's, specialist, doctoral, and professional programs both on campus and at selected off-campus sites throughout the region;
- Strives to meet the region's need for articulate and responsible citizens, a well-prepared workforce, and opportunities for continuing professional development;
- Serves as a regional resource for new knowledge, cultural enrichment, and solutions to contemporary problems; and
- Responds to the changing needs of its region through appropriate instructional, research, and public service initiatives and cooperative interaction with other colleges and universities, business, industry, government, and human service agencies (IBHE 2003, pp. 5-8).

In furtherance of this statement and in an effort to provide more attractive and visible sites for its extensive array of off-campus credit programming, NIU established three regional centers in the 1990s—two in the rapidly expanding western suburbs of Naperville and Hoffman Estates and one in Rockford.

ASSETS FOR ENGAGEMENT: EXISTING ACTIVITIES, LEADERSHIP, AND NATIONAL TRENDS

Off-campus credit programming had a long history at NIU, dating back to the 1930s when education faculty offered professional development courses to aspiring teachers throughout the region. Management of the off-campus program had an equally long history, which included 25 years in a College of Continuing Education, followed by ten years of decentralized programming from the academic colleges supported by centralized site management, budgeting, registration, needs assessment, and marketing.

Additionally, and of particular importance in growing the engagement function, NIU is home to the Center for Governmental Studies (CGS), an applied research and technical assistance unit which was developed in the 1960s as an outgrowth of the university's nationally ranked Master's degree in Public Administration (MPA). The MPA program has been an especially rich link to the university's service region because its faculty work closely with area municipal officials, and its graduates serve in a wide range of municipal positions in almost every city or town of any size in northern Illinois. As the needs of municipal governments have become increasingly complex, the Center's work has become increasingly multidisciplinary and now incorporates workforce development initiatives, policy analysis, mapping, land use, association management, human services, and informatics. Well before national higher education associations began to focus on the engagement function, NIU had at least one unit, CGS, with a history of activities which would qualify as "engagement" by any of the current definitions.

NIU's core is made up of its seven academic colleges, all composed of faculty who aspire to recognition in national or international disciplines according to

national and international norms. These faculty members do not typically “think locally,” and regional engagement is not for most of them high on the priority list. Nevertheless, because NIU recruits regionally and because most of its graduates return to roles in the region, all of these colleges have developed substantial regional alumni networks made up of people in positions for which they were prepared in programs on the NIU campus. Those networks can be leveraged, and those alumni can be encouraged to think of the university as an obvious partner in collaborative initiatives of mutual interest. Such collaboration has often occurred, but has rarely been recognized or centrally reported. Nevertheless, the networks, the past practices, and the potential for further development constituted assets on which the institutionalization of an engagement function could build.

The division the university now calls Outreach, Engagement, and Regional Development (OERD) was created in 2001 during a period of presidential transition. This action built on the retiring president’s legacy of educational entrepreneurialism and his deep conviction about serving the region through relevant academic programs and applied research. The new president, who arrived during a period of budgetary instability, was necessarily focused on financial matters and delegated the development of the new division to a vice president with substantial regional knowledge and institutional longevity. The vice president, who had previously managed a number of administrative units, but whose background included work in the university’s original college of continuing education, retained responsibility for information technology services, the university’s central computing services, and its entrepreneurial director, believing that function would be critical to external communications and could perhaps provide technology support to underserved areas in the region. With the support of a provost who understood and believed in engagement, the new division assumed management responsibility for the following:

- Information Technology Services
- Northern Illinois University’s three regional centers
- Outdoor education campus
- Center for Governmental Studies
- Community college relations function
- Online learning unit
- A state-wide economic education program
- NIU’s public radio stations
- Regional credit programs
- Non-credit programs
- Conferencing functions

Reorganizations of this sort are common in higher education, particularly in response to turnover and new leadership, but this one gained some helpful legitimacy from the national conversation related to engagement associated with publication of the reports of the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and

Land-Grant universities. At the request of the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC), now known as the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities (APLU), the Commission published six reports based on meetings held between January 1996 and March 2000. The first five reports, one of which focused on the “engaged institution,” called on public universities to “return to their roots” and become the transformational institutions they were intended to be. The final report called for a renewal of the partnership “between the public and the public’s universities.” The Commission’s recommendations to advance engagement challenged institutions to make engagement a priority on every campus and a central part of the institutional mission. The recommendations urged development of an engagement plan and encouragement of interdisciplinary scholarship and research. The report also identified the need for incentives to increase faculty participation in engagement efforts and for stable funding in support of engagement on university campuses.

As a regional institution which had only recently been invited to join NASULGC, NIU benefited from the Commission’s conclusions and the attention given to them at national meetings and in higher education publications. The national conversation bolstered the re-organization initiative at NIU and lent much-needed credibility to campus discussions of the engagement function (NASULGC 2000, pp. 13-17). The Kellogg reports inspired a parallel effort by the Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) whose membership includes most of the regional public universities in the United States. AASCU published its call for further attention to the engagement function in a 2002 report called “Stewards of Place.” Many of the concepts championed in the Kellogg Foundation reports on engagement as well as in the AASCU report, “Stewards of Place,” were reaffirmed in 2005 when the Carnegie Foundation introduced its elective “institutional engagement classification.”

To summarize then, the recognition of the engagement function at NIU and the development of a supportive organizational structure occurred at a moment of administrative turnover and institutional restructuring and in the context of a growing national conversation on the role of engagement in public universities. None of the units included in the development of NIU’s engagement division were created anew; all were well-established entities on the NIU campus. Fortunately, those entities included one unit, the Center for Governmental Studies, with very substantial analytical capacity and detailed knowledge of the region, its demographics, industry clusters, and economic assets. Finally, the administrator charged with developing the new division had a long history at the university, had worked in or with most of the units involved in the restructuring, and knew most of the personnel affected by the transition. Taken together, these elements no doubt made the development of the engagement function at NIU easier than it might otherwise have been. However, organizational change is rarely simple, and even the best and most motivated staff need opportunities to talk through issues and develop a common language and a shared sense of their collective future. For this, the new division relied heavily on Jim Collins’ best-selling book, *Good to Great* (2001), conveniently released just as the reorganization effort was beginning to coalesce.

LAUNCH OF THE ENGAGEMENT ENTERPRISE:
CONFRONTING THE BRUTAL FACTS

Following the *Good to Great* framework, the vice president brought together ten respected staff from across the newly assembled units to assess the division's situation. Several meetings were devoted to reviewing the history of the university, the development of the region around it, and the realities that both the division, as a newly created unit, and the university itself faced at the beginning of the new century in a rapidly changing political and economic climate. As Collins would say, the group confronted the "brutal facts." Among those facts, perhaps the most brutal for an institution with NIU's history of development and aspiration, was the number of nationally-ranked, even internationally-ranked institutions which shared the education space in Illinois. These include Northwestern University and the University of Chicago as well as the University of Illinois, which claimed both flagship status and the land-grant mission in addition to the metropolitan mission and major medical complex of the U of I's Chicago campus. With competition like this, it would be difficult to convince either legislators or donors of the need to commit resources to the development of another institution of comparable quality (Figure 12.2).



Figure 12.2 Northern Illinois Community College Locations
Note: Concentric circles indicate 40 km increments from DeKalb, IL.

Brutal fact number two, NIU is embedded in a dense network of excellent community colleges with workforce and economic development responsibilities of their own and well-regarded instructional programs at the freshman and sophomore level. Those programs are very attractive to the regional students who have formed NIU's traditional undergraduate market. The programs are

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competitively priced and conveniently scheduled. Aggressively marketed, they threaten to skim the university's instructional base from the bottom up. This situation would have significant financial ramifications for the university and would seriously undermine its claim on the northern Illinois region. Additionally, many of the region's community colleges actively seek locally accessible baccalaureate completion partnerships with universities wanting to serve place-bound working adult populations. NIU is a welcome participant in those partnerships, but has had to deal with the fact that adult students are evaluating the university's programs against those of schools prepared to compete both on price and the time required to complete a degree.

EMBRACING NIU'S ROLE: A REGIONAL INSTITUTION IN A GLOBAL REGION

In response to these realities, the NIU team looked again to Collins, and much time went into answering the three questions at the core of what Collins calls the "Hedgehog Concept."

- What can we be passionate about?
- What drives our economic engine?
- What can we be best in the world at?

In the end, the group concluded that the appropriate and potentially most successful role for the new division was to spearhead the university's embrace of its role as a regional institution in a global region. This meant recognizing and celebrating NIU's long history as an institution which pursues and welcomes the racially and economically diverse student body which populates the rural, suburban, and urban areas of northern Illinois. It meant keeping track of those students when they return to the region to take their first jobs, providing them with continuing professional and graduate education, and collaborating with them in their professional roles. It meant reminding current faculty and staff that northern Illinois is a region which can provide subject matter for a very wide range of disciplinary interests and research, a region which is sufficiently varied and robust to attract new faculty and staff from other parts of the country. It meant identifying and analyzing the social, cultural, economic, and educational issues which confront a region as dynamic as northern Illinois and collaborating wherever possible with other stakeholders to address those issues in mutually beneficial ways.

As it happened, this approach recognized work which came naturally to many faculty and staff, reflecting a long history of outreach and collaboration with community colleges, schools, municipalities, and health and social service agencies. It also generated much-needed revenue during a decade in which public university funding from the state was significantly reduced and access to federal grants and contracts became increasingly competitive. Outreach to regional students and collaboration with other regional stakeholders does in fact fuel the division's economic engine, and interaction with the northern Illinois region is something that NIU really can, as Collins would put it, be the best in the world at.

PRACTICING ENGAGEMENT: EXEMPLARS – BROADBAND NETWORKS,
P-20 CENTER, AND REGIONAL ENGAGEMENT/ROCKFORD

No initiative illustrates the convergence of regional and university interests better than the expansion of broadband technology. Begun in 2004 with the establishment of NIUNet, a 75-mile, fiber optic loop connecting NIU's main campus in DeKalb with its three regional centers, the university was well positioned to establish the regional partnerships necessary to pursue government funding for the development of additional broadband networks connecting health providers in rural areas with specialists in critical fields such as radiology, cardiology, and neurology as well as with public sector organizations. Now near completion, the broadband networks will use over 4,000 miles of fiber optic cable to connect more than 600 Community Anchor Institutions (community colleges, libraries, healthcare organizations, police and fire departments, and state, county, and municipal offices). This is not a project most universities could manage without significant help from other regional players; but, perhaps more significant, it is not a project most universities could pursue unless the regional relationships were already in place, and collaboration was already a standard operating procedure. Even in institutions with well-established outreach and engagement functions, the involvement of IT professionals in economic development activities external to the campus is not a common occurrence. The Broadband Development projects have generated over US\$126 million in federal and state funding, confirming the division's initial belief that embracing the university's regional role would in fact pay dividends in new revenue streams.

There have been other successes as well, and, as suggested by the Collins framework, the most important initiatives have contributed to the cumulative momentum which results in the sustained development of the engagement function. The university's long history in teacher training and the delivery of professional development courses to K-12 school personnel provided a basis for greatly expanded interaction with rural, urban, and suburban school systems across the university's service region. Recognition and encouragement of that interaction led to the establishment of a Center for P-20 Engagement jointly managed by OERD and the office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs. The P-20 Center ("P-20" covers pre-school through graduate school) illustrates one of the important functions of an engagement operation—serving as a neutral convener, drawing interested faculty and staff from across various departments and colleges. More than 200 faculty and staff now collaborate on topics as diverse as STEM Outreach, a web-based grant opportunity with schools, new state mandates that affect multiple programs, summer camps administered independently by six different campus offices, and requests from regional superintendents for innovative programs such as professional development schools. These multi-disciplinary, multi-unit meetings often result in project development, management, and communications provided initially by the P-20 Center and then handed off to faculty champions, who receive continued support from the P-20 Center staff. The P-20 Center also manages nearly 30 projects which involve two or more colleges with a number of external partners. In 2012, the P-20 Center's activities involved

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21,570 K-12 students, 1200 teachers, 6100 community members, 544 NIU students, and more than 100 NIU faculty. Its many accomplishments over the past five years include the following:

- Creation of a nationally recognized STEM Outreach function which produces a major STEM festival each fall.
- Participation in career academies in five high schools.
- Sustained development of an NIU Center for Economic Education.
- Collaboration with area community colleges to facilitate student preparation and articulation to four-year programs.
- Sponsorship of highly innovative instructional tools which integrate fine arts and technology into literacy instruction in both traditional classrooms and online video games.
- Leadership of the development of a web-based backbone for personalized instruction and school improvement in partnership with state and federal agencies.
- Creation of an online virtual lab school which will serve middle school students and NIU teacher candidates.
- Staffing for the Illinois Interactive Report Card (IIRC), a website which maintains test results and other school improvement information for Illinois schools and draws 100,000 visitors per month.

Like the Broadband Development project, many of the P-20 Center initiatives have benefited greatly from internal collaboration between engagement staff and computing personnel.

The growing recognition of the engagement function has legitimized the university's persistent, but often frustrating, efforts to help the city of Rockford move beyond the economic downturn in the manufacturing sector. The existence of NIU Rockford, one of the centers built in the 1990s to provide credit classes for adult students across the region, offered an obvious location for an engagement office dedicated to collaboration with the city. The appointment of an Assistant Vice President (AVP) for Engagement in Rockford underscored the university's intention to build an ongoing partnership and to collaborate on issues of mutual concern. In consultation with university and community leaders, the new AVP established an engagement agenda for Rockford, setting forth a set of goals and related activities to enhance educational attainment and public education outcomes, help build a culture of innovation with local manufacturers, improve Rockford's appeal as an international city, and improve the quality of life through arts and cultural assets. The AVP pulls faculty and staff from NIU's main campus in DeKalb to the Rockford area to build relationships, increase university visibility, and make connections between university expertise and resources and community expertise and resources. One immediate win for the Office of Regional Engagement/Rockford was leading a collaborative effort to win a US\$2.4 million federal Jobs and Innovation Accelerator Challenge grant for the aerospace cluster.

The AVP also assumed a leadership role in the development of a Joint Institute for Engineering and Technology—Aerospace.

The NIU Office of Regional Engagement/Rockford provides a model of place-based university engagement and civic leadership which can be replicated in the university's other two centers in the western suburbs. The development of the engagement model at these two centers and the continued development of the Rockford center will rely heavily on the analytical capacity of the Center for Governmental Studies. CGS staff members develop extensive reports on economic and workforce development issues in the areas around each of the regional facilities, provide data for collaboration between university and community college personnel and local residents, and develop a shared vision among stakeholders who live and work in the area around these NIU satellites.

PRACTICING ENGAGEMENT: "IN-REACH," LEGISLATIVE OUTREACH, GLOBAL ROLES

The work of engagement is often associated with outreach activities, but equally important are organizational "in-reach" efforts, which gather useful intelligence needed to facilitate partnerships. For example, an important workforce development issue concerns access to higher-level credentials for working adults who possess two-year career and technical (CTE) degrees in fields such as nursing, allied health, public safety, and technology. Given the need for higher levels of education among a broad array of professions, the issue of baccalaureate programming for community college students with associate of applied science (AAS) degrees—a group that represents over a third of the associate's degrees awarded by Illinois community colleges—has led to vigorous discussion in the Illinois legislature regarding whether to grant baccalaureate degree-granting authority to community colleges. Because the AAS has often been called a terminal degree suited to preparing individuals for more rapid entry into the workforce, and because AAS programs typically have a curriculum which contains fewer general education requirements and more non-articulating technical content, configuring a progression pathway that is both desirable for the marketplace and fully endorsed by university faculty presents complex challenges. This issue was of significant interest to legislators representing the many community college districts in NIU's region. OERD staff helped coordinate discussions among university and community college faculties so that a series of mutually beneficial, student-centered baccalaureate completion programs could be developed to serve a previously marginalized audience. A side benefit, of course, was the amelioration of a politically complex situation which could have resulted in externally imposed curricular reforms with limited faculty support.

Finally, and in recognition of the unusual region in which the university operates, the division has begun to focus some of its attention on international engagement. Other regions in the world legitimately claim a global role, and most such regions are home to internationally recognized institutions of higher education, but few four-year public institutions of higher education serve as the

single four-year university player in such a large, populous and economically significant space. The well-regarded, four-year institutions, both public and private, located in the city of Chicago are embedded in the metropolitan landscape. When they think “regionally,” they tend to follow the shores of the Great Lakes, looking north to Milwaukee, south and east across Indiana and northeast to Michigan. Their natural education partners are the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee, Purdue University, and the University of Michigan. Their natural local partners are metropolitan authorities, international financial institutions, and global corporations. They do not bring the mayors of Chicago’s western suburbs to their workshops, let alone the mayors of the small towns on the western side of the state, or the presidents of the 26 community colleges spread across northern Illinois. If there is a role for higher education to play in linking the rest of northern Illinois to the global drivers of the Chicago metropolitan region, that role might reasonably be claimed by NIU.

The university took a small step toward global engagement in 2009 when it agreed to serve as the North American node of an international consortium focused on regional approaches to development. PASCAL International Observatory grew out of work on learning regions and cities inaugurated by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). PASCAL associates attempt to bring researchers, practitioners, and policymakers together to promote innovative regional development and to overcome the barriers to desirable development imposed by historic boundaries and jurisdictional areas. Participation in the PASCAL network has provided NIU staff with opportunities to compare policies and practices between two-year and four-year institutions in the US and in Europe and to assess the applicability of middle-school curricula in economic education in low-income urban areas in the US and underdeveloped areas in Africa. By participating in the PASCAL Universities’ Regional Engagement (PURE) initiative, NIU worked with several of the region’s community colleges and workforce development organizations to identify workforce development gaps which could be addressed by means of new forms of collaboration. The PURE project has spawned work in three areas: innovation in baccalaureate progression (touched on above), inter-organizational collaboration to develop web-based systems for increasing access to regional data needed by organizations focused on economic and workforce development, and the creation of a regional collaborative designed to increase college-going among the region’s Latino populations.

PASCAL’s focus on “boundary spanning” initiatives and its commitment to building place management partnerships are compatible with and reinforcing of the engagement philosophy which has evolved in US higher education over the past 25 years. For a developing organization like NIU’s OERD, being able to point to European, Asian, and African projects, which have been nurtured by a similar focus on collaboration and inclusive networks, has been exceedingly helpful and quite gratifying. Similarly, finding like-minded colleagues in so many different areas of the world has underscored the importance of “engagement” and its value in a wide range of circumstances.

DISCIPLINE AND THE ENGAGEMENT ENTERPRISE: SELECTING INITIATIVES

Looking to the future, OERD anticipates bringing its experience in managing regional centers, its growing understanding of regional development, and its comfort with collaboration and networking to bear on health education issues being addressed by a consortium of institutions in Lake County, an area at the northeastern corner of the state. This is a part of Illinois long considered to be underserved by institutions of higher education. Its population of 700,000 includes some of the state's wealthiest citizens and some of the poorest. Part of the Chicago metropolitan area, its lakefront communities include those which belong to Chicago's affluent and well-educated North Shore as well as those facing industrial decline and a renewed focus on revitalization. The Great Lakes Naval Station, located between these radically different communities, is now the US Navy's only Recruit Training Center and, as such, is responsible for putting nearly 40,000 recruits through navy boot camp each year. But Lake County sees the health care industry as a primary focus for its future.

According to NIU analysts, the Lake County health care cluster, broadly defined, accounts for almost US\$2.5 million in employee compensation annually and US\$10 million in gross county product. Developing and maintaining the skilled workforce which will be necessary to sustain and grow this cluster, particularly in a period of reduced public funding and increasing demand for health care services, will be a significant challenge, one which will require a concerted and sustained effort on the part of regional employers and educational providers. This effort is just getting underway, and its ultimate outcome is impossible to predict, but NIU's participation is taken for granted, and OERD staff have the experience and expertise to make meaningful contributions. Ten years ago, the university would not have been an obvious partner.

SUSTAINING THE ENGAGEMENT ENTERPRISE

Creating new organizational structures within an institution is one thing; championing a new institutional function is quite another. Outreach and engagement activities need the visible support of university leadership to maintain their legitimacy, and outreach and engagement units must be relentless in their efforts to communicate their value and their successes to both internal and external audiences. OERD contributes regularly to university newsletters; publishes an annual report; makes presentations to local, state, and national audiences; maintains several blogs; and often produces text and slides for insertion into presidential speeches, press releases, and presentations to the legislature. OERD staff members have been vocal participants in university committees, strategic planning bodies, and reaccreditation groups. They make a point of "showing up," volunteering for university roles, and serving as representatives and spokespeople for the university's external focus whenever possible. OERD staff also have been actively involved in the national engagement movement. NIU's designation as a Carnegie "engaged institution" and the involvement of division staff on national

boards and committees has enhanced NIU's reputation and visibility on a larger stage, bringing external validation to the function within the university.

The OERD division began with a coalition of the willing. This coalition has expanded as engagement successes have been embraced and are being institutionalized. A chapter in the university's most recent strategic planning report, "Regional Impact, Outreach, Engagement, and Graduate Education," suggests that the engagement function and the regional role championed by the OERD division have achieved campus credibility. Presidential Engagement Professorships now exist at NIU alongside well-established professorships in research and instruction. Viewed from the division's starting point, the transformation has been dramatic, but it has been building incrementally over the years and feels more evolutionary than revolutionary. Are there lessons here for other institutions? Perhaps, but they too are hardly revolutionary. The Collins framework is helpful. It forces the development of some parameters for use in a sea of possibilities. It imposes bottom-line considerations on university units which are not used to floating their own boats. It reminds managers of creative professionals that self-directed people work best on things they care about. In a region as dynamic and cosmopolitan as northern Illinois, there are always more opportunities than there are resources to pursue them. There is also intense competition, particularly for initiatives that appear to be sure things, so success requires a willingness to take a few risks. Some initiatives fail, but failures can be useful, especially if the players revisit Collins' Hedgehog Concept with those failures in mind. Can the division's progress be sustained? Only if new initiatives reinforce existing projects and if new and continuing staff maintain the discipline necessary to pursue achievable goals consistent with the university's role in the region and the division's core values of collaboration and regional impact. Much has been achieved, but the university is again undergoing a major administrative transition and is again facing unresolved financial issues. The success of the division will be measured as much by its ability to perform under new leadership as by its history of success over the past decade.

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NOTES

1. The U.S. Census Bureau (2012) is the source for these figures, which represent money income earned between 2007 and 2011, in 2011 dollars.
2. Figures represent the percentage of persons 25 years of age and older between 2007 and 2011 that attained a baccalaureate degree or higher. This average was 21.1 percent for the city of Rockford and 30.7 percent statewide.