

# Achieving Engagement Through Co-Curricular Activities

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## ABSTRACT

*Engagement is quickly becoming a high priority in business education. AACSB standards require engagement and the Carnegie Foundation instituted the “Engaged University” classification. Different types of engagement such as professional engagement, academic engagement, community engagement, private engagement, and public engagement are often discussed as important for student learning. Engagement is also defined to include student/student engagement and faculty/student engagement. Given the myriad definitions and types of engagement, understanding engagement, the different types of engagement, and the definitions of engagement is a challenge faced by business schools. Further, the question of how engagement can be achieved in business education is not only important for accreditation but is also important to the long-term success of students and business schools. This paper will review the concept of engagement, its role in accreditation, and how co-curricular activities can be used to enhance engagement.*

## ENGAGEMENT

In a 2012 article (<https://www.forbes.com/sites/kevinkruse/2012/06/22/employee-engagement-what-and-why/#496ed58f7f37>) Kevin Kruse defined engagement as the emotional commitment the employee has to the organization and its goals. In the 2013 AACSB standards engagement is defined as a *collegiate environment in which students, faculty, administrators, professional staff, and practitioners interact and collaborate in support of learning, scholarship, and community engagement*. Reising and Dale (2017) defined engagement as meaningful interactions among faculty, students and business professionals. These definitions imply that there is active involvement of all stakeholders in the educational process. Engagement is a result of the systematic implementation of the various stakeholders of the college.

Burch, Heller, Freed and Steed (2015) identified and developed a measure for three different types of engagement. They defined engagement in terms of emotional engagement, physical engagement, and cognitive engagement. Lunt, Chonko, and Burke-Smalley (2018) propose a four-step process to enhance engagement through assessment, redesign, implementation, and evaluation.

Studies have defined various types of engagement and developed surveys to measure engagement and discussed the importance of engagement. Engagement has been discussed both from a learning perspective as well as an accreditation necessity. However little attention has been paid to how co-curricular activities such as student clubs and internships may be used to enhance the engagement of not only students but faculty and business professionals as well.

## **ENGAGEMENT THROUGH CO-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES**

There are many opportunities to increase the engagement of students, faculty and the community not only in traditional classroom setting but also through co-curricular activities. Co-curricular activities include a variety of experiences available to students. These include activities such as student organizations, conferences, internships, community projects etc. However, it is important to note that students need a strong theoretical foundation in their discipline to maximize the benefits of engagement through co-curricular activities.

### **Professional Experiences and Internships**

One way to achieve engagement with the community and professionals is through Professional Experience and Internship programs. These programs are designed to provide "real world" experiences that are considered integral to success in the business world. Internships can be for credit or no credit and are usually the responsibility of individual departments. Our University implemented a professional experience as a graduation requirement for all students. Students are required to attend information sessions, resume workshops and a professionalism and interviewing workshop prior to starting their professional experience. The professional experience consists of fifty hours of work with professionals related to the students' major or career interests. This program requires all students to engage with professionals in business and the community.

### **Competitions**

Both internal and external competitions may provide opportunities for student/student engagement, student/faculty engagement and student/professional engagement. Most competitions require student to engage each other through team activities and to work with a faculty and/or professional advisor. In many cases, students will be presenting to and judged by professionals in their field. In addition, they may have a chance to interact with individuals from other universities in national and international competitions.

Examples of competitions include student managed investment fund competitions, entrepreneurial challenge, advertising challenges and ethics case competitions. Many of these are national or international competitions that allow students to engage with students and faculty from around the world.

### **Student Clubs**

Student organizations provide an excellent vehicle for achieving all types of engagement. Faculty involvement through advising and attendance at meetings and events enhance faculty/student engagement. In addition, there are many opportunities for professional engagement through the use of guest speakers at meeting and corporate tours. Community engagement may be achieved through club members participating in community activities and events. For example, student clubs may volunteer to help local charities with fundraisers or other activities. Social events such as banquets, receptions, and other social gatherings give

students an opportunity to engage with faculty, other students and possibly business professionals in a setting outside of the classroom.

## **Curriculum Design**

Although all courses in the curriculum should have some aspect of engagement, specific courses can be designed and/or designated to have significant levels of engagement. Whether a University designs courses for engagement or incorporates engagement activities in their current courses will be dependent on resources and school goals.

In finance the use of student managed investment funds as either a class or extra-curricular activity has grown exponentially in recent years. This activity requires students to manage investment portfolios of real money. This type of course results in significant levels of engagement between students, students and faculty and students and professionals. Many investment classes will use an investment simulation to engage students in the current financial markets through investment competitions and activities.

Marketing will often offer an advertising campaign class where students design advertising campaigns for clients and compete with other Universities. Marketing will also work with clients in developing marketing strategies through the marketing research class. Many Management departments will offer a small business counseling class or work with a small business center. These offerings allow students to engage with small businesses in the community. Another example of classroom engagement is the use of a senior project in the computer information system program.

## **Student Conferences**

Student conferences allow students to engage with students from other universities, faculty and professionals. There are many different student conferences across disciplines that students can participate in. The Financial Management Association has student leadership conference every year for students interested in careers in finance. The conference has professional speakers, social events and other activities that provide many opportunities for engagement. Another example in finance are student managed investment fund conferences such as the Global Asset Management Education forum. These conferences bring together students and professionals interested in the field of Investments.

There are national conferences in all disciplines that provide an opportunity to increase student engagement with professionals and students from around the country. In addition to Marketing, Management, and other majors, there are also special opportunities for student engagement. One example is the National Conference on Ethics held at West Point. This invitation only conference, allows students from around the country to engage about ethics.

## **BENEFITS OF ENGAGEMENT**

A systematic approach to engagement both in the curriculum and through co-curricular activities provides many benefits to the students, faculty, college and the community.

Student engagement enhances the learning experience of students through their greater involvement with learning process by expanding learning beyond the traditional classroom. The application of classroom concepts in co-curricular activities and “real world” class projects

engages students and allows them to see the importance of the concepts that they have been learning.

By engaging the business community in curriculum, students have the opportunity to interact with business professionals on consistent basis. This helps develop the professionalism of the students and builds their networks. Also, interaction with professionals should enhance the students' employability. By engaging both students and the business community the college may enhance the recruitment of students by improving relationships with local businesses and aiding students in their job searches.

Faculty involvement and engagement in co-curricular activities will impact the relationships between students and faculty. Interactions between faculty and students outside of a typical classroom provide an opportunity for more informal learning and may lead to better learning outcomes

The college also benefits from increased engagement. Not only does a systematic approach to engagement aid in the accreditation efforts, but also may improve other key outcomes for the college. Increased engagement with the business community may very likely improve the fundraising activities of the college and placement of students.

## **CHALLENGES**

Although there are many benefits to increasing the engagement of faculty, students and professionals, there are also limitations. Engagement, especially through co-curricular activities requires significant time commitments outside of the normal classroom. This time commitment may be difficult for students that work and for both faculty and business professionals who have many other commitments. Also, it may be difficult to find community partners who are willing to make the long-term commitment needed to fully integrate professional engagement in the curriculum.

## **CONCLUSION**

There is little doubt that the concept of engagement will continue to grow in importance. Although the initial push for systematic integrations of engagement was driven by accreditation standards, there is growing recognition of the importance of engagement in the learning process. In this paper we have explored the different ways that engagement is defined and discussed the various opportunities available for enhancing engagement through co-curricular activities.

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