



## **Imagining America 2011 Business Meeting Notes IA National Conference, September 22-24, 2011**

### **Introduction**

As Imagining America emphasizes the importance of local and national organizing in the movement to transform higher education, it sees the need to expand beyond the campus representative model that has long been employed in the consortium.

To foster greater IA participation among a broad array of campus and community stakeholders at our national conference, we inaugurated the IA “business meeting,” which, unlike the former representatives meeting, was open to all conference attendees.

There were several goals to this business meeting:

- To update participants on significant Imagining America news, including new and ongoing research initiatives;
- To provide an overview of Imagining America’s evolving communications strategy, including the launch of a new website; and
- To hear from stakeholders from IA member institutions about specific, local organizing strategies to advance public scholarship and civic engagement, and discuss.

### **Reports from IA Staff and Board Chair**

- **Kevin Bott**, IA Associate Director, emphasizes IA’s stance as a mission-driven and research-driven organization, one that increasingly sees its ability to advance our [Vision, Mission, Values, and Goals](#) (VMVG) as being fundamentally linked to the integration of research, membership, and communications strategies.
- **Bruce Burgett**, National Advisory Board Chair, discusses IA's strong and mutually beneficial relationship with our current host institution, Syracuse University. Announces that IA has been invited to stay at Syracuse through 2017, and that Jan Cohen Cruz will complete her term as director on July 1, 2012. For more information see [news release](#).
- **Jan Cohen-Cruz**, IA Director, discusses various [IA Opportunities](#) for getting involved, such as Collaboratories, which are networks of incubation for ideas and topics of interest to the consortium. Another opportunity being organized through IA is [Town Hall Nation](#), a series of events that provide space where many political points of view can be discussed prior to November 2012 elections.
- **Timothy Eatman**, IA Director of Research, provides overview of research initiatives. Discusses amplifying and aligning research enterprise of IA. Reiterates IA's research-driven identity and expresses eagerness to share fruits of IA research with members. Welcomes communication from members to strategize best uses of research in local contexts.
- **Jamie Haft**, IA Communications Manager, discusses IA’s communications priorities: developing strategies for sharing the consortium’s many innovative campus-community humanities, arts, and design projects and research, and providing platforms for intra-consortium collaboration. Current projects include building IA’s new website (<http://imaginingamerica.org/>), [blog](#), and social media ([Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Flickr](#), and [YouTube](#)), and strengthening IA’s engagement with the press.

## Consortium Members Discuss Specific Local Challenges & Strategies

### **LeeAnn Lands, Kennesaw State University**

#### Specific Challenges:

- Building supportive infrastructure for engagement
- Organizing faculty (e.g., no central office at KSU facilitates campus-community partnerships)
- Expanding tenure and promotion policies to recognize engaged scholarship
- Losing one of KSU's champions of civic engagement, Sarah Robbins, to another institution

#### Strategies for Overcoming Challenges:

- Joining IA and mobilizing the campus through a professional development seminar focused on public scholarship, which attracted allies from around the campus
- Involving the president's office and using language that resonates with the campus (in this case, "community," "faculty-led," "faculty-initiated," etc.)
- Putting key faculty on major campus committees (in this case, on the strategic planning initiative that is designing KSU's long-range strategic plan that launches in 2012)
- Using unforeseen events to your advantage (in this case, some undesired national attention)
- Creating a campus-wide team to institutionalize public scholarship and assist in KSU's pursuit of Carnegie's Engagement Classification in 2015

### **Patrick Lee Lucas, University of North Carolina-Greensboro**

#### Specific Challenge:

- Implementing community engagement guidelines that had been developed at the University-level within individual colleges, schools, and departments

#### Strategies for Overcoming Challenge:

- As the University's Office of Leadership and Service Learning faculty fellow, I studied the impact of community engagement for the department of interior architecture. My colleagues and I did this in the following ways:
  - By looking inward at our mission and vision statements. We considered the views of community partners, industry partners, alumni, students, and faculty.
  - By writing promotion and tenure guidelines to reflect community engagement in our own department.
  - By convening a summit of five past advisory board chairs to consider the issue.
  - By integrating community engagement into our curriculum.
- The study provides the foundation for the institutionalization of community engagement by other departments, all of which are undertaking the same process of instituting the university-wide guidelines. We are hopeful that our study is a useful demonstration to other departments.

### **Gregory Jay, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee**

#### Specific Challenge:

- Getting people from across a fairly large and complicated campus involved in Imagining America

#### Strategy for Overcoming Challenge:

- Inventing a chapter model at our campus with the cooperation of IA's national office
  - Our assembled a steering committee for our chapter, IA@UWM, to make the case for joining IA to UWM's provost and chancellor.
  - The chapter leverages the membership by, among other things, soliciting and helping to develop presentation proposals to the national conference. We reach out to engaged faculty and say, "Well, do you know about IA? We know about your project, wouldn't it be great to show your project at the IA conference? Let's develop a proposal or a panel." We've had people from UWM presenting at every IA conference for the last four years. Today we have ten people from UWM attending: two undergraduates, a graduate student,

and seven faculty members from across three schools and colleges. Those of us on the steering committee for the chapter get very involved in reaching out to our colleagues around the campus, and that way we can showcase their work and then they can come back and use it in support of tenure, promotion, more grants, and try to leverage the membership.

- We use an IA@UWM website to get information out to the campus about chapter activities.

### **Table Discussions**

At this point, tablemates were encouraged to discuss one or more of the following questions:

- What is a specific challenge/obstacle to institutionalizing/legitimizing/doing civic engagement on your campus or in your community?
- Strategies for dealing with challenge/obstacle?
- How can the IA network better support your efforts?

**Below are a few comments and quotations around themes discussed at many of the 23 tables.**

### **Challenges & Obstacles to Institutionalizing/Legitimizing/Practicing Civic Engagement**

- Lack of communication between faculty (assigned to teach service and engagement courses) and staff (who tend to coordinate with community partners).
- Many institutions suffer from Balkanization on campus wherein no engaged scholars know about one another or one another's work.
- Faculty members are incredibly entrepreneurial and self-focused; getting people to rally around a larger umbrella is challenging.
- Need to expand into something resembling the chapter model [described by Gregory Jay]. "It's too overwhelming to be one of two IA reps charged with sharing information back on campus."
- Great need for formal structures supporting engagement. The hub for interested faculty must go beyond a provost's committee.
- "There may be fundamental problems with the existing institutional structures that create the barriers to this work. The divide between student affairs and academic affairs for example. Many faculty fail to recognize that learning happens in student affairs. How do we reinvent the infrastructure to allow for transformational change?"
- Faculty members inherit projects, or are assigned to learning communities, without any real investment of their own. This actually can create a backlash against civic engagement.
- "We have required community engagement as faculty but no assessment models, thus no way to maintain – or prove – standards of rigor."
- Community colleges facing the dual problem of commuting students, and faculty who reside far from campus. How to engage them if neither constituency is pushing for engagement?

- Too many civic engagement organizations and each one charges a fee. It is very difficult to make the case for each.
- Need for faculty to travel/present/write about the community engagement that they do -- faculty members sometimes don't see the connection between community-engaged work and their own scholarship.
- Continued need for education of faculty and more visibility for engaged scholarship.
- Need tips for developing deep community partnerships on a shoestring budget. With overworked faculty and staff, how to manage relationships without necessary support and resources? How do we frame this as something of which our institutions should devote resources?

### Strategies

- Form an IA Chapter or some other “hub” where different stakeholders can come together to share information, and identify possible partnerships and resources.
  - Students in particular, who are confused about where to go on campus to get “plugged in” to community engagement projects, need a “one stop shop” that represents all possible ways of being locally engaged. This can be created formally, through institutional structures, or through a civic engagement chapter that brings together the several separate campus groups.
  - Through a chapter, many different centers and departments contribute to funding for both IA membership and conference travel (esp. for those who have no other funding, such as community partners).
  - "Start with your ‘friends’ when trying to institutionalize public scholarship – to avoid the challenge of trying to persuade folks of value of IA/public scholarship.”
- Use IA website to amplify local work and become visible as part of national network working on similar areas of inquiry and action.
- Use humanities centers to create visibility for faculty specifically and for civically engaged humanities broadly.
- Make clear that each campus can design and define its understanding of public scholarship. IA advocates need to make clear that humanities, arts, and design is IA's particular vantage point but not the totality of its vision.
- Make sure that there is a concrete plan for “next steps” following any planned convening of public scholars and allies. It is common to bring people together for a conversation but fail to provide a structure for further involvement.
- Bring people to IA national conference and charge them with connecting with others from around the country so that you're seeing the conference as place to “create networking opportunities at national level which will spark work back at campus.”
- Use graduate assistants – or funded fellows, if possible – to coordinate with community partners.
- “Create programs, such as mid-winter or summer academies/institutes, to train faculty in civic professionalism. There is a great need to catch faculty up, especially when there are top-down

mandates, which are often resented to begin with. This is only exacerbated when there is no guidance provided to fulfill the mandates.”

- Use a campaign with grants for faculty, such as "Tulane Empowers" at Tulane University. “We've found that donors want to fund specific initiatives, and will put resources behind civic engagement initiatives, including research and classroom-based activities. Things like community-based research grants and service learning course development. These are very popular and they bring faculty on board to civic engagement.”

### What Might IA Do?

- Help campuses bring people in from other campuses to share with faculty in a very in-depth, discipline-specific way.
- Regional meetings of campuses that work in common neighborhoods or cities so that clear folks to contact can be established and we don't all re-invent the wheel. This would help coordination and sustainability of engaged work.
- We need a documentation toolkit for engaged work.
- Can we identify the ways in which engaged work is integrated into scholars' teaching, research, and service? Need case studies of individual faculty, especially in the humanities. Can IA share how this kind of work can be built into a faculty member's workload? Is there a cohort of people who can talk about their own experience of being promoted and working in their field?
- Need to more explicitly say why engaged work is part of our job, and not just something we do because “it's the right thing.”
- IA needs to talk to scholarly societies and connect missions and definitions of public scholarship in a way that our disciplines will accept.
- Could IA support independent scholars (unaffiliated with institutions) in a more discrete way? Perhaps special conference sessions, meetings, etc? How can independent scholars be active participants in IA?
- The civic engagement movement lacks a structure for providing peer-review for tenure and promotion portfolios for engaged scholars. Can IA serve in that capacity?
- More sharing of successful models, syllabi, curricula, etc.
- Make clear the “origin of intentions.” Is this about service or scholarship? IA can help us articulate and make a case for the distinction and support both sides.
- If positioning the IA network as one of organizing, provide a platform that members can decide to rally around. What are we organizing for?

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