Summary comments from Campus Compact Advanced Institute on Civic Engagement
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I want in this summary to give you my sense of April 22-23 Advanced Institute meeting on
civic engagements. These comments are not complete notes from the meeting, but I hope are
reasonable summaries of important elements of the discussion. As you asked, I also have
included my advice about next steps at the end of the memo.

<u>Robert Zemsky s presentation</u>. The meeting began with a terrific evening presentation from Bob
Zemsky about his College Results Index or CRI. Zemsky stressed to the group that doing
these kinds of assessments is very hard work, and that trying to come up with ways to measure
something as complicated as civic engagements would be particularly difficult. He estimated
that it cost close to $3.5 million to develop the CRI — a number that will be helpful to keep I
mind as Campus Compact considers its options for moving forward with this work.

<u>Advantages/disadvantages of the different models.</u> Much of the group s discussion centered on
brainstorming the advantages and disadvantages of three different approaches to civic
assessments: classification systems; rankings or competitions; and accreditation. The groups
seemed to stick to their assignments pretty well, although in retrospect I think they latched onto
aspects of the topics and stayed there to some extent. For instance, my sense of the discussion is
that the classification group talked about rankings more than classifications, whereas the
rankings group went to best practice or Baldrige-types of awards rather than rankings.   I think
this means that people just didn t know how to have a different kind of discussion - either about
a possible continuum of types of institutional civic engagements, designed to characterize rather
than to rank; or about hierarchical competitions that end up suggesting that some models are
 better than others. Also, the discussions of advantages/disadvantanges were confined to the
specific strategy being discussed, and were not explicitly designed to compare the relative
advantages of (for instance) classification strategies as compared to accreditation approaches.
That discussion of relative advantages/disadvantages did occur, sort of, but in the context of
strategies, which I ll report on later.

<u>Classifications</u>:

>*Advantages*: There are several substantive advantages of the classification approach:
>public validation of the activities; clarification about definitions and measures; and
>encouragement of diverse routes or paths to civic engagements.
>
>*Disadvantages:* The downsides to the classification approach are primarily strategic: it
>won t be possible to hitch this effort onto the Carnegie wagon, because the Carnegie
>effort relies on existing data sets, and measures of civic engagement don t exist. As a
>result, the issue of warrant or ownership of a publicly valid process becomes a difficult
>problem to overcome. A classification system that is developed by believers or
>insiders will not have credibility in the research or higher education world.   A second
>downside is that it isn t clear how the development of a classification system helps in
>strengthening commitments to civic engagements.   Community-based groups are also

not going to be interested in a classification system - it is primarily useful within higher education.

Rankings/competition

Advantages: The advantages of the ranking/competition approaches are that they can be relatively easy to do because they don t necessarily require extensive data gathering or consensus about models before-hand. (This depends on the approach - they could be very data-driven.) Like the classification-system approach, rankings would provide an external validation of civic engagements. Of the three different approaches, rankings/competitions are potentially the most helpful in involving external communities in the development of measures (and as a result would be the most visible to public legislative and community groups). They also have the advantage of leveraging change within the institutions, because competition and the drive for public recognition drives change within institutions. And finally, an advantage is that the criteria for competitions will force the community to look at the issues of standards and evidence of performance.

Disadvantages: The disadvantages of the rankings/competition processes are that they are judgmental and competitive, can be a barrier to innovation, will be hard to do well, and may not be credible within the academy. The group was sufficiently uncomfortable with the downsides of rankings/competitions that it wanted to discuss these approaches as public recognitions, not rankings or competitions. The strategies that were recommended as ways to move forward are all therefore about public recognitions, not competitions or rankings.

Accreditation:

Advantages: Accreditation can engage an incremental, building process (documentation, description, self-studies, standards and goals, comparisons), which is a big advantage for this approach. The assessments can build on existing processes for experimentation in assessments from alternative accreditation strategies being piloted in the different regional agencies; these alternative models provide opportunities for flexible strategies that can be tailored to fit different circumstances. Specialized accreditation can provide direct routes into assessment of the different forms of civic engagement within the disciplines. Like the other processes, accreditation can help build validation and clarification about civic assessments. Accreditation is a process for the measurement of quality, and unlike most other proxies for quality, process measures are particularly appropriate measures of civic engagements.

Disadvantages: Accreditation is primarily useful for internal institutional assessments and (potentially) improvements; there will be almost no movement toward standards or models from accreditations, so the assessments won t evolve naturally into the basis for strengthened public accountability for civic engagements. The accreditation process can be captured by distinct groups within the academy, and if it is not managed carefully, will end up creating resentments and resistance to change efforts. (The experience with experiments in using accreditation to measure diversity are a case in point: the accreditors

wanted to use self-study to strengthen self-assessment of the connection between diversity and quality, but others perceived the effort as exercises in political correctness that were forcing quotas on the campuses.)

Strategies for moving forward. The group seemed to agree that an incremental strategy, designed to build on existing processes, relying on evidence, designed to be made public, and able to be replicated, was the best way to go. The sense of the meeting was that two different models needed to be pursued more or less simultaneously - one was the development of best practice models of civic engagement, and the other was to encourage institutions to use alternative or experimental models of accreditation as tools for assessing the effectiveness of civic engagements.

> The best practice route. Several models for building best practices were discussed, including the APQC (American Productivity and Quality Center) benchmarking model, and a Pew model. The general pattern seems to be as follows: A number of institutions that are believed to be doing cutting edge work are identified, and teams of people from those different institutions brought together to two and three-day planning groups. The sessions are designed to brainstorm specific examples of the work, including measures of effectiveness, strategies for improvement, and sustainability. These examples are then used as the basis for developing benchmarks or models. Once the documentation has occurred and the benchmarks developed, that framework could then be the basis for the development of a survey of Campus Compact member institutions as to their strategies for civic engagements. The results of these surveys could in turn provide the basis for the development of typologies of different kinds of civic engagements, as well as (potentially) national recognition programs.

> Accreditation strategies. A good deal of momentum has built up to use accreditation as a vehicle for improvement and strategic quality enhancement. The Pew Trusts have been encouraging this work, and are working with the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) to promote these models with the regional accreditors. Several of the specialized and national accreditors are also encouraging this work, such as the American Academy for Liberal Education (AALE), which stresses self-assessment based on campus-defined goals rather than national standards. Campus compact could partner with CHEA and Pew to encourage the use of these models to strengthen civic engagements.

The role for Campus Compact. Campus Compact should draw upon its core strengths, which is the engagement of campuses working through presidents. Campus Compact needs to continue to be collaborative and consultative with other national and regional organizations that are doing this work. The institutions that are already members of campus compact are an ideal core group with which to begin any new strategy.

Caveats/cautions: The conversation was structured to focus on strategies that are meaningful within higher education institutions, but will be poor tools for assessing the effectiveness of institutional connections to communities. There was some talk about extending the models described above to include discussions with community-based groups, but these ideas surfaced

rather late in the day and were not systematically debated as to pros and cons. My own sense is that we inadvertently developed a model with our three types of assessments that will not work well for assessing institutional/community engagements.   A different kind of discussion needs to occur with that topic as its centerpiece. Brian Murphy made this point as well, and has volunteered to help with a second effort to focus on the campus as citizen and engagements with communities should you move in that direction.