

Definitions of Outreach & Public Engagement

2021-07-01, Outreach and Engagement Committee

Library Outreach

“In academic librarianship, outreach is work carried out by library employees at institutions of higher education who design and implement a variety of methods of intervention to advance awareness, positive perceptions, and use of library services, spaces, collections, and issues (e.g. various literacies, scholarly communication, etc.). Implemented in and outside of the library, outreach efforts are typically implemented periodically throughout the year or as a single event. Methods are primarily targeted to current students and faculty, however, subsets of these groups, potential students, alumni, surrounding community members, and staff can be additional target audiences.” ([Diaz, 2019, p. 191](#))

Outreach activities are typically one-way communications that build awareness and facilitate the use of the Library’s collections and services, encourage life-long learning, and the creation and strengthening of relationships between the University and the communities that it serves. Some examples of library outreach activities include exhibits, presentations about the Library’s resources, and tours.

Public Engagement

The [Office of the Provost](#) uses the [Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement](#) to define community/public engagement. The definition reads:

“Community engagement describes collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity. The purpose of community engagement is the partnership of college and university knowledge and resources with those of the public and private sectors to enrich scholarship, research and creative activity; enhance curriculum, teaching and learning; prepare educated, engaged citizens; strengthen democratic values and civic responsibility; address critical societal issues; and contribute to the public good.” ([Public Purpose Institute, 2020](#))

In the library context, this entails programs and activities that draw on the Library’s professional expertise, collections, and resources in a collaborative partnership with diverse user communities to explicitly include people not affiliated with the university to contribute to the public good. Some examples of library engagement activities include Small Press Fest, Chai Wai series, workshops held in collaboration with local public libraries, and many more.

Sources

- Public Purpose Institute. (n.d.). Community Engagement Classification (U.S.). The Public Purpose Institute in Partnership with the Carnegie Foundation. <https://public-purpose.org/initiatives/carnegie-elective-classifications/community-engagement-classification-u-s/>
- Diaz, S. A. (2019). *Outreach in academic librarianship: A concept analysis and definition*. The Journal of Academic Librarianship, 45(3), 184-194. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2019.02.012>