

Scholars on Tap: Informal Public Scholarship as a Strategy for Community-Academic Engagement

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Issue: Traditional academic presentations often occur in settings that can limit opportunities for informal dialogue, relationship-building, and interaction among community members, students, faculty, and staff. There is growing interest in approaches that make research and academic topics more accessible while strengthening community-academic connections and cross-institutional engagement.

Description: Scholars on Tap (SoT) is a community-facing engagement initiative supported by the Flint QuadPod that creates informal spaces for conversations about research, health, education, and community in Flint, Michigan. Hosted in local venues, the series is designed to reduce barriers between academic institutions and the public while strengthening cross-institutional connections among faculty, staff, and students. Presentations have explored topics such as motivational interviewing, medicine and public health, mechanics, community-engaged research, with an emphasis on storytelling, interaction, and real-world relevance.

Lessons Learned: This presentation focuses on lessons learned from implementing SoT as both a community-academic engagement strategy and a faculty and student outreach initiative. These lessons are based on organizer reflections, observations of participant engagement, and informal attendee feedback rather than a formal assessment. Observations suggest that informal community settings may foster participation, networking, trust-building, and audience interaction in ways that differ from traditional academic presentations.

Recommendations: Recommendations include prioritizing speakers who can translate complex ideas into meaningful conversations, incorporating interactive elements, and intentionally designing events to foster connections among faculty, students, and community members. Institutions should recognize public scholarship, interdisciplinary collaboration, and community engagement within promotion, tenure, teaching, and service frameworks. SoT demonstrates how informal public engagement can strengthen trust and deepen collaboration.