

The Scholarship of Engagement: Enriching University and Community

BY MARCIA A. FINKELSTEIN

The past several years have seen a renewed emphasis on building bridges between higher education and communities outside academia. Spurred by the Kellogg Commission (1999) report on “The Engaged Institution,” even universities with little history of outreach are establishing centers, colleges, and administrative positions to promote and support partnerships with the public. Of course, a commitment to outreach, or exporting knowledge from the academy to the community, is not completely new. For example, land-grant universities have operated with a mission that values public service that is now being re-interpreted and expanded to match more modern view of reciprocity and mutual benefit. Since the mid-twentieth century, many public universities in large cities have claimed an “urban” or “metropolitan” mission of which the most distinctive element is an interactive, knowledge-based relationship between campus and community.

What is new, and what the Kellogg Commission report stresses, is a widespread recognition that knowledge and expertise can also flow from town to gown. The term engagement has been coined to reflect this emphasis on the reciprocity of university-community relationships. Together, the participants address issues of mutual interest; together they determine the questions to be asked, the methodologies to be employed, and the means by which findings will be disseminated.

Increasingly, faculty are expanding their professional horizons by applying their expertise to problems beyond the university. In turn, they find their research, as well as their teaching, enriched by the collaborative process. Innovative methodologies are explored; new ways of sharing knowledge are developed. The result is a growing appreciation throughout academia of the scholarly value of engagement. Engaged scholars are expanding the perceptions of faculty roles and responsibilities and of the place of the community in higher education.

The articles comprising this issue of *Metropolitan Universities* highlight efforts to make engaged scholarship central to academia. Faculty and administrators committed to their communities examine the structures and strategies their institutions use to promote and sustain a culture of engagement. The examples are as varied as the universities and communities themselves. While some integrate engaged research and teaching into academic units or colleges, others establish centers or cross-college learning communities. What all the approaches accomplish is to dispel the notion of community-based efforts as separate from scholarship.

Rosaen, Fishman, and Fear note that while the extensive focus on engaged scholarship is a recent phenomenon, engagement has thrived for years on the margins of university life. Drawing from the experiences of scholars across Michigan State University, the authors construct a model of the “engagement interface,” exploring the dynamics of the processes that underlie successful university-community partnerships. The paper also offers an example of the university’s commitment to engaged scholarship: a learning community of faculty who help each other navigate the engagement frontier.

Amen offers insights into the complexities of that frontier as he examines a failed effort at university-community collaboration. He describes attempts over a two-year period to forge partnerships among three community-based organizations and the University of South Florida. Amen examines the dynamics of the interaction, analyzing the roles played by the competing goals and conflicting decision-making procedures of each party. The inability of the groups to effectively partner provides lessons for others who are interested in applying their professional skills to public concerns. Guidelines for universities seeking to establish successful engagement programs are provided.

That the academy and the community both have much to gain from successful partnering is amply illustrated by Shorr, Rothman, and Parks. Using the Temple Health Connection (THC) of Temple University’s Department of Nursing as a case study, the authors identify the institutional structures and resources that are required to support and sustain engagement. The reader learns how the Temple Health Connection works with neighborhood groups to seamlessly integrate research, practice, teaching, and community needs.

Like Shorr et al., Schumaker and Woods describe a program that serves as a model of engaged scholarship. The College of Public Affairs and Community Service is helping to fulfill the University of Omaha at Nebraska’s mission to be *of* the community, not simply *in* it. This interdisciplinary College promotes research and teaching partnerships with the Omaha community. The authors use insights gleaned from the College’s thirty-year history of outreach and engagement to explore the ingredients necessary for sustained collaboration.

Cope and Leatherwood discuss the challenges of maintaining a university culture that embraces engaged scholarship as readily as it does traditional research. The University of Illinois at Springfield was founded on a mission of outreach and community service. With the school’s recent incorporation into the University of Illinois system comes a new emphasis on discipline-based research. The authors explore the difficulties of, and opportunities for, fostering a scholarship of engagement within the context of these changes.

Unifying a metropolitan university’s research and engagement missions is the goal of the center described by Finkelstein. The Center for Engaged Scholarship at the University of South Florida operates from the premise that all scholarly work has

potential applications beyond academia. The Center's activities help faculty to partner with community groups while also meeting the expectations of their departments and disciplines. Finkelstein notes that efforts to bring faculty activities into the public arena hinge on universities recognizing and rewarding engaged scholarship.

Maser provides an example of how engagement with a public entity is incorporated into Portland State University's undergraduate curriculum. The author details the development of a service-learning course that combines academic rigor with a community-based experience. As with the myriad engagement efforts profiled in this issue, the partnership is shown to benefit all participants. Maser notes that the key to successful collaboration is uncovering community needs rather than imposing an agenda.

Together, the efforts recounted in the following articles provide a sampling of the many ways in which universities are bringing engagement from the periphery to the center of academic activity. A welcome consequence of the emphasis on engaged scholarship is a blurring of the traditional boundaries between research, teaching, and service (Boyer 1990). As communities demand greater accountability, particularly from their public institutions, universities are integrating engagement into every aspect of faculty work. The result is a true reciprocity of effort and influence that enriches academic inquiry as much as it does the community.

References

Boyer, E.L., *Scholarship Reconsidered* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990).

Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities, *Returning to Our Roots: The Engaged Institution* (New York: National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, 1999).