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From the Editor: Examining the Commitment of Engaged Scholars: A Call to Action

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Examining the Commitment of Engaged Scholars: A Call to Action

It is my pleasure to have this opportunity to return to the editor's page and share my thoughts with the engagement scholarship community. Many of you may have observed that Associate Editor Dr. Nick Sanyal provided the last editorial comments, as I was unable to do so due to a family emergency that took me away from *JCES* for about four months. My sincere appreciation is extended to Dr. Sanyal, editorial assistant Vicky Carter, and the rest of the *JCES* team who stepped in and provided leadership for *JCES*, making sure it met its production schedule. Being home for an extended period of time in the neighborhood in which I grew up (a neighborhood many would consider

less than desirable, but will always be home) deeply affected me in relationship to civic engagement, community engagement, and engagement scholarship. I was starkly reminded of the personal impact of societal disparities on individuals' quality and longevity of life and how these disparities connect to the well-being of families and communities.

Today's society is one plagued with issues of racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, ageism, classism, health disparities, genocide, hunger, homelessness, peonage (convict labor), and violence, domestic and otherwise. Unfortunately, this short list could continue on indefinitely. For example, recent poverty statistics for 2013 released by the U.S. Census Bureau (DeNavas-Walt & Proctor, 2014), show that young children continue to be the largest group to live in poverty, leaving them vulnerable to insufficient nutrition and inadequate health care. Shootings of unarmed African American men, current day use of debtors prisons for the poor, bombings that kill innocent children and adult civilians, and international public beheadings leave us feeling fearful, confused, and, in many ways, helpless.

Boyer (1996) refocused the responsibility of institutions of higher education to address societal conditions: "Increasingly, the campus is being viewed as a place where students get credentialed and faculty get tenured, while the overall work of the academy does not seem particularly relevant to the nation's most ... pressing problems" (p. 15). Boyer made a strong case for those of us in the academy to take ourselves out of the proverbial "ivory towers" and "... become a more vigorous partner in the search for answers to our more social, civic, economic, and moral problems ... (p. 12). Many of these are the issues highlighted above. The question we must ask is how well are academic institutions addressing the issues of our nation and the world? It is a privilege to be an educator, especially at the post-secondary level, where we are entrusted with shaping the minds of the next generation. With that privilege comes a responsibility and with that responsibility comes the mandate to be beacons of integrity. We must be certain to move beyond credentialing students and getting tenure while playing politics to promote our own personal and academic interests. What do we see as the tangible results of our "engaged scholarship"? How committed are we to truly promoting civic engagement, including establishing true partnerships with students and/or communities? How much does the work that we do really contribute to addressing the problems of our nation and the world at large? Are we truly, as engaged scholars, improving the quality of lives of those so negatively affected in this world, and if so, how sustainable are those improvements and changes? At what expense are we willing to move on to pursue that next grant or sole authored article for our dossiers? How do we really define "partnerships" with students and communities who are essential to the work of engagement scholarship? These are complex questions with no easy answers. Yet, we must ask them, no matter how difficult, and seek honest answers to them.

Are we capable of doing more? Are we capable of doing a better job? I say yes. And not only are we capable, we are obligated to do so if engagement scholarship is to be more than a popular trend, clouded by rhetorical talk and practices. This is not to say there is not good engagement work being done or that there are not those who are truly committed to the engagement work that they do. In almost eight years as editor of *JCES*, I have met many engaged scholars who are committed to the

work that they do, and *JCES* has published much of their work. This issue is no exception. In this issue of *JCES*, you will find a wide variety of engagement scholarship. With manuscripts representing work conducted in Haiti, Canada, and Tanzania, theoretical and practical contributions to engagement scholarship are provided. Several of the articles address the many complexities and challenges of working with community partners, providing practical suggestions for addressing these challenges, culturally, contextually, and otherwise. We are quite pleased to have three Student Voices manuscripts in this issue that present the thoughts of one arm of the engagement scholarship triad. Dr. Heather Pleasants, book review editor, includes a strong collection of books on which excellent book reviews are provided. What you may note missing from this issue is a community piece, which I think is partially related to the issue of how much we, engagement scholars, truly value our community partners' voices. Again, I know we can do better.

As always, I hope you enjoy this issue of *JCES* and extend a thank you for all whose contributions make *JCES* the stellar publication into which it has developed and continues to grow. That would not be possible without your contributions and feedback. So, please share your thoughts, ideas, and insights with us at jces@ua.edu.

Reference

- Boyer, E. (1996). The scholarship of engagement. *Journal of Public Service and Outreach*, 1(1), 11–21.
- Denavas-Walt, C., & Proctor, B.D. (2014). U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, *Income and poverty in the United States: 2013*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.