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Book Review: The Application of Publicly Engaged Scholarship to Graduate Education

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The Application of Publicly Engaged Scholarship to Graduate Education

Review by Jed Metzger, Nazareth College, Rochester, NY

Amanda Gilvin, Georgia M. Roberts, and Craig Martin (Eds.), *Collaborative Futures: Critical Reflections on Publicly Active Graduate Education*. Syracuse, NY: The Graduate School Press., 2012, 409 pages. ISBN: 978-0-9777847-5-2

How best to educate and train graduate students in the 21st century is both a pragmatic and complex dilemma. On the one hand the next generation of scholars will face an ever-changing job market both in and outside of academia. Competition and fiscal realities demand that these graduate students bring a host of competencies with them to address the challenges of the day. The editors of *Collaborative Futures: Critical Reflections on Publicly Active Graduate Education* make the case that for higher education to be relevant it must be constructed to address public concern. One critical aspect is how the graduate students themselves are engaged into their education. This volume makes the case that the best way to engage graduate students is via what is happening around the campus' physical boundary. The editors have compiled a volume that addresses the historical development of publicly engaged scholarship. It clearly articulates the essential elements of this scholarly approach and gives a platform for the voice of the engaged new American graduate student.

From a practical perspective, this text fills a literature gap in that it is directed at graduate education. Having spent 15 years teaching in a place with roughly the same number of undergraduate and graduate students, I am amazed by how much more attention is given to undergraduate education. In a similar way the literature base on publicly engaged scholarship has a stronger undergraduate focus, which makes this text refreshing and vital. The book's perspective addresses both issues for these modern age graduate students and for their instructors. As an instructor, one great question I have is how to be purposeful in academia. Frankly, I imagine that many in academia are similar in that they face the challenge of doing more than keeping the wheels of the institution churning; it is a question of being purposeful. Publicly engaged scholarship is one way to address this concern. This is especially true for those scholars who possess the critical consciousness to see the world outside of

academia as really struggling to address the modern society challenges of poverty, homelessness, racism, and veteran reintegration to name but a few.

One core idea running through the text is that "Big C" culture remains America's defining issue in 2015. Teaching graduate students to speak academia is insufficient; there is at the least a need for a bi-lingualism where graduate students need to speak the language of the people. At the same time graduate students need to remain optimistic, to not let negativity drag them down into complacency. One clear strength of this volume is the depth of writing that is infused across many of the articles related to this skill set. The reader is repeatedly challenged to consider questions of privilege, power, and race, while maintaining a proactive activist mindset.

Collaborative Futures gets off to a fantastic beginning by Timothy Eatman. He is such a leading voice with deep knowledge of publicly engaged scholarship. Eatman sets the tone by imploring us to be leader/activists in disseminating critical ideas. Highlighting that engagement by definition means inviting diversity to the table, diversity that is as underrepresented at the academic table as it is in positions of power outside higher education. Eatman directs us to work the horizontal plane of relationships by linking and bridging. This question of positioning is made throughout this volume: Are we helping our graduate students to be intentional in the space they create? Can they work with an understanding of their role as people of privilege and power? As the next generation of scholars, have they developed the ability to address the "wicked problems" (Rittle & Webber, 1973)? The clear answer provided throughout the text is that power and position need to be considered on the front end of our scholarship activities so that the new scholars can attempt to successfully address these critical questions.

The first section of the volume is dedicated to

an integration of the history behind publicly engaged scholarship. Timothy J. Shaffer, in addition to giving a fine history on the development of the land-grant system, makes a strong argument for publicly engaged scholarship as living the mission behind the very creation of a land-grant system: That there be access for all to the ladder of opportunity via the most historically successful of means—education. Positioning is a central concept in formulating engaged work (an idea later expanded upon nicely by Susan Curtis, Shirley Rose, and Kristina Bross). The question of how graduate students are taught positioning, and if graduate work that is informed at all times by positioning are important considerations given proper attention throughout the text. To this end, is the inclusion of a 1968 paper by Ivan Illich. The paper warns against the paternalistic thinking of American idealism. Brief in terms of length but long in terms of depth, it is a required reading for anyone thinking of doing public engagement work. Another great historical document is an early Kellogg Commission piece. To my mind the inclusion of the original seminal works in the first section of this volume not only sets the stage for the work but makes the text essential. Knowing from whence one comes helps the graduate student prepare for the realities of today. In a practical way, the seven-part test at the end of the chapter is a great tool to run before any of us dive into a project; it is a “checks and balances” tool to ensure the positioning that is essential in proper engaged scholarship. Another strength of the book is the way that AAUP is tied to publicly engaged scholarship (Nicholas Behm and Duane Roen’s chapter in particular). Exploring the limitations of a public/private binary is a requirement to avoid neo-liberalistic messes while maintaining the requisite academic freedom to do this work. I also credit the editors for including the AAUP statements as reference material. The history section closes with the most seminal of writings in this field, Ernest L. Boyer’s “The Scholarship of Engagement” (1996). Sure one can get the article elsewhere but including it just adds value.

The middle section of the volume focuses on present day application of publicly engaged scholarship to graduate education. Readers will find these chapters directly useful, coherent, and applied. Day and colleagues begin the second section by using examples to further the call to promote graduate students transitioning into both the new academia job market and the traditional job market, successfully arguing that engaged scholarship

develops the required skill set for later success as an activist and engaged human. Part of this success is the skill set that is required in real cross-cultural exchange. Neither academia nor our graduate students get a pass in today’s society. We run the risk of being seen as charlatans if we do not have the ability to work alongside communities of color from an empowerment mindset (Solomon, 1976). George Sanchez picking up on Eatman’s thesis discusses the critical intersection provided by many engaged scholarship graduate course applications in which graduate students can wrestle with real diversity—“rubber hits the road learning.” Specifically, Sanchez extends the discussion to the role urban institutions have with the communities around them, strenuously arguing that we as faculty have a role in transforming our institutions of higher education so that they are more reflective of the diversity in America today and that we need to work to ensure that our community projects do not become feel good projects. (I struggled with the same in a recent community gardening project where my students consistently asked to work with the children over the more sticky work of engaging the adults who lived bordering the garden). This line of thought pushes the conversation into one of how do we educate in a democracy verses educate in a capitalist system? How are we positioning ourselves and our graduate students to be intentional?

These essential and thorny questions dominate the middle section of the text. Meighan uses the lived metaphor of “getting outside” the classroom to demonstrate how activist engaged graduate course work can directly transfer to post graduate life direction. Arguing against seeing publicly engaged scholarship as elective or add-on coursework, she frames it as the most vital of teaching pedagogy. Special kudos for her inclusion of syllabus material to show what full engagement in a semester really looks like. Linda S. Bergmann, Allen Brizee, and Jaclyn M. Wells use post dissertation analysis to provide rich example-driven content on how an engaged dissertation is actually possible and what is needed in terms of institutional support to sustain such. Articles by Jan Cohen-Cruz, Marcy Schnitzer and Max Stephenson Jr., and by Ron Krabill all give direct testimony to the vital nature for both graduate students and community partners of democratic, roots-oriented engaged scholarship. Collectively, they debunk myth and challenge old-school higher education tradition and publication ideologies to posit a voice for a more democratically minded engaged approach.

There is a brief but fantastic “interchapter” between the second and third section on specific skills from the kind folks at *Imagining America* – honest, useful stuff in a few short pages.

The final section is dedicated to walking the talk by providing opportunity for direct voice. Sylvia Gale challenges us with discussion but most importantly a tool to use for ourselves and with our students to get them to slow down and connect to what they truly want. There is nothing wrong with a goal such as “I want to be a full professor” but what Gale helps us do is to deconstruct that desire and then look at the intersecting pieces that make up what is behind that goal. It is a question of intentionality. Intentionality is about space. Space is useful in directing sustained engagement energy. Space is useful in addressing the role of power and privilege. My guess is that the readers will put this particular chapter into practice as a self-correcting tool. While there are several chapters in this final section, four are worth particular mention: Chris Dixon and Alexis Shotwell offer direct advice on how to maintain an activist mentality while in graduate school with balance and creativity. This is useful stuff for faculty to read lest we forget what the crazy juggling act of graduate school is like. Ali Colleen Neff takes us even further down this colorful rabbit hole. The final two articles, one by Damien M. Schnyder and one by Amanda Jane Graham conclude the text with stories of their deeply personal work. Exceptionally well written, they are examples of this new scholarship, not the dry dusty road stuff, but the living American engaged scholarship and without going over the top provide perfect examples of the type of real work that pushes way past “do-goodism” into honest connection and usefulness to those connected.

In summary, this is a highly useful volume on several levels: It works as a reference guide; it is directly practical with regard to teaching today’s graduate student; and there is clear example of what successful engaged scholarship artifacts look like from today’s emerging scholars. That said, the biggest room in the house is the room for improvement. Specifically I was surprised a few voices were not included, most glaringly, I would say, KerryAnn O’Meara, who is such a modern champion, and while referred to and cited, her original voice would have added strength, as would that of Dwight Giles and Sarena Seifer. This concern aside, the editors are to be congratulated for this well-articulated and much needed volume.

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