

Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship

Volume 14

Issue 3 *Engaged Scholarship: Sharing Views of Possible Futures for Extension and University-Wide Engagement*

Article 2

January 2022

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Recommended Citation

Pruitt, Samory T. (2022) "Road Map to the Future of Engagement for Both Land-Grant and Non-Land-Grant Institutions," *Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship*: Vol. 14 : Iss. 3 , Article 2.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.northgeorgia.edu/jces/vol14/iss3/2>

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Road Map to the Future of Engagement for Both Land-Grant and Non-Land-Grant Institutions

Samory T. Pruitt

When planning a long trip, the first thing most of us do is consult a road map (in digital form today) to chart the best route and determine how long it will take to get to our destination. For those traveling the community-engaged scholarship path, that road map is becoming clearer than ever as we make our way through the ins and outs and ups and downs of the movement. As we join hands and look down the road through the many directions of community-engaged scholarship, our future looks very bright indeed.

As one who has been an engagement advocate for the past 20 years, I believe an argument can be made that the success of higher education depends to a large degree on a strong commitment to community-engaged scholarship. It's that basic and that important. While some colleges and universities struggle to gain the essential public and governmental trust that they need to thrive, a trust we once could take for granted, we are entering a period of greater support, vision, execution, and clarity, thanks to the nationwide commitment to engaged scholarship.

That commitment has resulted in some 360 institutions of higher education earning the Carnegie Foundation's Classification for Community Engagement. Only three states—Utah, North Dakota, and South Dakota—lack at least one community-engaged institution within their borders, and several states have as many as a dozen (Commission on Public Purpose in Higher Education, n.d.). The emergence of *community-engaged scholarship* as the encompassing term for this distinction is due in part to the Carnegie classification, which has elevated community engagement as a symbol of the modern university's commitment to democratic engagement and education (Giles, 2016).

History and Definitions

A variety of terms are used in the literature to cover every possible aspect of community-engaged scholarship. Despite the different approaches these terms describe, they all share the properties of community involvement and collaboration. These

various terms include—in addition to *community-engaged scholarship*, the term most frequently used—public scholarship, civic engagement, public engagement, student engagement, service-learning, community-based partnerships, and community-based learning.

The different terms are not so much a problem as they are evidence of the variety of ways in which engagement can occur. At some institutions, the work is done largely through special courses that send students out to work with communities. At others, the activities are planned by separate administrative units or student organizations. And at still others—for example, at my own institution, The University of Alabama—engagement happens through all of these ways and more.

While there are almost as many definitions out there as there are people trying to define community engagement, here is how the Carnegie Foundation defines it:

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. (Commission on Public Purpose in Higher Education, n.d.)

At The University of Alabama, our approach to community engagement is built on authentic partnerships that permit our students, faculty, and staff to work with communities (and communities to work with us) through innovative

programs that channel our mission of teaching, research, and service toward improving quality of life for individuals and communities in Alabama and beyond.

So, just what is the correct definition? There is no one correct definition. Furthermore, we believe this variety is one of the strengths of community engagement, as communities' diverse needs, traditions, and opportunities mean that what works in one place may not work as well in another. There is no one "model" for community engagement. At best, most institutions employ a framework of "values, principles, and processes" (Beaulieu et al., 2018, p. 1).

As we examine the many aspects of today's community-engaged scholarship, keep in mind that engagement has always existed in some form in American institutions of higher education. We see its modern evolution as one of the major positive developments in higher education today. We also see it as a way to restore the essential trust that the public must have if these important, and costly, institutions are to thrive.

To understand the evolution of engagement scholarship over the decades, we should look at engagement's historical roots. The 1862 Morrill Act established the first land-grant institutions. Their purpose was "to educate and serve the general public in order to create the workforce necessary to fuel an industrial society and feed a growing population" (Fitzgerald et al., 2017, p. 32). These institutions were charged with providing teaching, research, and service to rural and agricultural communities (McDowell, 2003). Next came the 1890 Morrill Act, which created 18 historically Black colleges and universities with land-grant status and missions.

As Gavazzi and Gee (2018) discuss in their analysis, land-grant institutions have a mission that combines teaching, research, and service. Today, many non-land-grant universities, including my own, have adopted some of this same language because it fits their engagement scholarship framework.

The modern move to community-engaged scholarship is due in part to efforts during the 1990s to reform higher education based on the premise that public institutions should serve the needs of the public through a reciprocal relationship between academia and community (Glass & Fitzgerald, 2010). This "two-way" street (Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities, 1999, p. 9) conceptualizes engagement in terms of public service and outreach

(Sandmann, 2008). Kasworm and Abdrahim (2014) conducted a case study of model examples and found that there is not a uniform definition of engagement scholarship.

The modern definition of engagement scholarship begins with Boyer's challenge to public universities, land-grant and otherwise. From his vantage point as an academic as well as the leader of the Carnegie Foundation, Boyer must have been thinking, "Why not organize higher education in such a way as to put some of that talent to work solving some of society's most difficult problems?" This led him to write the following:

[T]he academy must become a more vigorous partner in the search for answers to our most pressing social, civic, economic, and moral problems—and must reaffirm its historic commitment to what I have chosen to call ... the *scholarship of engagement*. (Boyer, 1996, p. 18–19)

In effect, Boyer was telling those of us in the academy to put our brainpower to work solving some of those big community problems in health, jobs, equal rights, and housing. Thankfully, hundreds of institutions, large and small, have done just that.

One of the groups listening to Boyer was the Kellogg Commission (Kellogg Commission, 1999), which gave us this definition of engagement: "By engagement, we refer to institutions that have redesigned their teaching, research, and *extension* [emphasis added] and service functions to become even more sympathetically and productively involved with their communities" (Kellogg Commission, p. 9). The Kellogg Commission further urged universities to move away from the concept of "one-way transfer of knowledge" (Glass & Fitzgerald, 2010, p. 14). And as Bridger and Alter (2006) noted, even "two-way" knowledge is not enough: "In place of traditional forms of extension and outreach, which are dominated by a one-way transfer of knowledge from the university to stakeholders, there is a growing emphasis on the development of *interactive and mutually beneficial relationships* [emphasis added]" (p. 164).

Institutional Commitment to the Scholarship of Engagement

My role at the National Outreach Scholarship Conference and Engagement Scholarship Consortium has given me unique insight into the

many ways that public and private, land-grant and non-land-grant institutions have affected and defined the field of community-engaged scholarship and interpreted the Kellogg Commission's 1999 call to action. It goes without saying that the future of community-engaged scholarship depends on institutional commitment. Additionally, Gavazzi and Gee (2018) noted that one of the challenges facing the future of engagement scholarship is the role of faculty development.

With increased emphasis on publications for tenure and promotion, the question becomes how to position engagement scholarship as integral to teaching and service in academia today. These epistemological questions arise from how engagement scholarship is perceived: "Expert knowledge describes what is, but public work requires still another type of knowledge—'practical wisdom' about what should be" (Mathews, 2005, p. v).

This is partly because engaged scholarship is thought of as service, which is often devalued in comparison to research and teaching expectations (Vogelgesang et al., 2010). Problematically, labeling engagement scholarship as service scholarship lends to the "tendency to think of citizens as consumers of services or the constituency of institutions like colleges and universities," (Mathews, 2005, p. iv). Thus, the "public scholarship movement" (Mathews, 2005, p. iii) further examined how engaged scholarship is carried out in academia and critiqued the role of faculty in the movement.

In response to this debate, Franz (2009) developed a conceptual model that identifies the components of engaged scholarship, clarifying that the relationship between a university and its public should be more of a partnership. For faculty, Franz's (2009) model provides a practical framework for engagement scholarship and continues to aid emerging scholars in the field (Franz, 2019). However, organizational culture and institutional support can influence faculty involvement in engaged scholarship as well (Vogelgesang et al., 2010). As such, many universities have undertaken initiatives to develop faculty engagement programs for community-engaged scholarship (i.e., Hamel-Lambert et al., 2012). With regard to institutional support, if faculty believe they have a role in promoting community-engaged scholarship, they may be more active in furthering its acceptance at the institutional level (Jaeger et al., 2012).

With over 20 years having passed since the Kellogg Commission's 1999 call to reevaluate engagement, Ostrom (2020) argued that the future of extension should be readdressed as institutions

adapt to the 21st century. According to Ostrom (2020), one of the challenges facing Extension universities is what the public thinks extension means. However, as da Cruz (2018) highlighted, engaged scholarship has multiple meanings and has undergone many name changes over time, contributing to the dilemma of what constitutes engaged scholarship.

Future of Community-Engaged Scholarship

With regard to the future of engaged scholarship, one of the challenges facing the sustainability of engagement efforts is the direction of scholarship. As mentioned earlier, engaged scholarship emerged from the land-grant mission. Extension programs were primarily developed with a focus on "agriculture, home economics, and 4-H with rural audiences," yet the demographics and landscape of the country have changed over time (Franz & Townson, 2008, p. 9).

So, where does that leave us today? What kind of future do we see for the scholarship of community engagement? Quite frankly, we see a very bright future. Does this mean the end of traditional research? Of course not. Traditional or basic research will continue so long as scholars ask questions about the massive universe in which we live, so long as disease can strike with little warning, and so long as people continue to have hope for a better way of life. No, community-engaged scholarship will never dominate the curriculum or higher education research. But if recent history is our guide, we will see more and more institutions adopting principles of the kind of scholarship that lets faculty, students, and community partners come together to address important problems, the solution of which improves the lives of everybody involved while furthering students' education and improving institutions' standing with the public.

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