

Rhoten, D., & Calhoun, C. (Eds.). (2011). *Knowledge matters: The public mission of the research university*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press. 539 pp.

Review by Sam Cordes

The editors of this book, both of whom are affiliated with the Social Science Research Council, reached out to 21 other collaborators from around the globe to compile an impressive and thought-provoking body of knowledge. The international scope of this lengthy volume is one of its most compelling features. Indeed, Antarctica is the only continent not represented!

I wish the editors had created a final chapter that encompassed the contents of the book as a whole. Such a chapter might have attempted to ferret out common themes (and contradictions); summarize areas of cross-cultural difference and similarity; and perhaps pose some research questions for future consideration. Their five-page preface falls short of this calling, as it basically offers a brief summarization of each of the 15 chapters, with little integration or broader synthesizing. However, this is a small complaint and not one that should deter other scholars, including the readers of *JHEOE*, from putting on their thinking caps and delving into this volume.

The title of Rhoten and Calhoun's edited book needs to be emphasized. The book is not about the public mission of public universities, although public universities (which are not as easily defined as one might think) are part of the mix; and to some extent they do receive the bulk of the attention. However, private research universities also have public missions, often as part of their underlying philosophy or values (as is certainly the case with religious-based universities) or because they receive public funds for research or for other activities. Hence, the book examines the public mission of the research university, whether public or private.

If it is not always easy to make a sharp delineation between public and private research universities, neither is it easy to define "the public mission." In Chapter 2 ("Great Expectations, Past Promises and Golden Ages: Rethinking the 'Crisis' of Public Research Universities") Fischman, Igo, and Rhoten do a remarkably good job of framing what can be meant by "publicness." Four approaches are identified. One is legalistic, in which "the state" (which can be either national or a subnational jurisdiction) owns or charters the institution and provides funding as well. The

second approach is to think of higher education as exhibiting the characteristics of a “public good.” In economics literature, a pure public good is one whose consumption by one individual does not reduce its availability to another individual; and once provided, it is accessible to everyone. In this configuration, science, research, and education are produced for the unfettered consumption of all. A third approach links to what is frequently referred to as “the public interest,” which is grounded in some collective ethical notion of what is of broad societal value. This framing suggests that research and education have a public benefit and these services must be provided by public institutions, although this does not preclude their also being provided by the private sector. The final approach revolves around “public accountability.” Although grounded in the notion that research and education are intrinsically valuable in serving the public interest, the public accountability view layers-in an additional expectation. In this view, trust and credibility with the public require that an institution be responsive to societal demands and transparent and communicative about its performance.

Fischman et al. argue that the first three views of “publicness” prevailed until the 1980s, but since then there has been growing emphasis on the public accountability domain. Many of the other contributors to this volume support—and typically lament—this view. Their perspective rests on the hypothesis that this approach is part of a larger neoliberal philosophy that has guided much of the global thinking in many policy and topical arenas; hence, it is not too surprising that a “commodification” approach to knowledge and research has also come into play and that a market-oriented and private sector philosophy and terminology (e.g., cost and revenue centers and “the entrepreneurial university”) are becoming more prominent and dominant within higher education circles.

In Chapter 3 (“‘El central volume de la fuerza’: Global Hegemony in Higher Education and Research”), Marginson and Ordorika argue that some of the specific attributes of the public accountability approach had their origins in the New Public Management (NPM) model that first emerged in the United Kingdom in the 1980s. Marginson and Ordorika go on to link this view of publicness to other fundamental and challenging issues, including Anglo-American hegemony in higher education globally and the growing preoccupation with global higher education rankings.

Many of the remaining chapters in the volume focus on the public mission of higher education in a variety of countries and continents. This is a reflection of the societal importance of higher

education, especially research universities, throughout the world, as well as a recognition that false generalizations need to be avoided. In other words, “local” history and context matter . . . and they matter greatly. Indeed, the juxtaposition of the Anglo-American hegemony with the importance of “local” history, culture, context, needs, and opportunities associated with higher education in non-Anglo settings presents what may be the most challenging question—and most worrisome issue.

Academics and other scholars from within the United States may have the most to gain from this book, as we tend to be woefully ignorant of the history, context, and institutional configuration of higher education in other parts of the world, especially Asia, Africa, and Latin America. This is one of the prices U.S. scholars pay for the Anglo-American hegemony in higher education. Or, as Marginson and Ordorika note: “To some American faculty, nothing [in the way of research and knowledge] is produced outside the United States” (p. 91).

Many challenging and unanswered questions are raised in this volume, and many of them may not be of immediate interest to readers of *JHEOE*. However, some are likely to be of considerable interest and importance to those readers who are involved in outreach and engagement, broadly defined. Listed below are five examples—neither by priority nor in any logical order—of the type of thought-provoking issues and questions stimulated by the book that could have particular relevance for the readers of *JHEOE*.

1. What are the main issues and questions that arise if the title of this book is turned on its head to read *Knowledge Matters: The Public Mission of the Engaged University*? The initial instinct is to state that engagement is simply synonymous with the public mission. However, in many ways that may be begging the question, depending upon the nature of engagement, the services provided, and which part of the public receives the benefits. The final chapter (“Cultural Formations of the Public University: Globalization, Diversity and the State at the University of Michigan”) by Kennedy provides some important insights and perspectives on such issues. For example, should intercollegiate athletics be seen as part of the public mission, recognizing that this is almost exclusively an American peculiarity? Or, if one’s view of the public mission is linked to the notion of pure public goods, how does this square with technical assistance provided to a particular firm or

business? And which “public” is of highest priority: what Kennedy calls the proximate external publics (e.g., legislators and philanthropists) or global and disenfranchised publics?

2. On a related note, what aspects of outreach and engagement (O/E) lend themselves to the market-driven, neoliberal “publicness” lamented by some contributors to the book? Is it possible to create a model in which these activities generate revenues and help offset the cost of other aspects of O/E that are not “profitable” but are more in keeping with the broader view of public goods and the public interest?
3. If public universities have seen public funding decrease and the search for alternative sources of funding increase, what is the cause and effect? Can or should this cycle be broken? If not, what are the implications for the public mission? What are the implications for governance? For example, if state government contributes only a small amount of the total funding, what is the rationale for having a publicly appointed (or elected) governing board?
4. The Anglo-American hegemony expresses itself in a number of ways, including international rankings. These rankings are driven largely on the basis of research metrics, with a strong orientation toward “hard science” and little or no consideration of social sciences, arts, and humanities. When only a few disciplines are included and when teaching and O/E are completely excluded, the public mission—however defined—is being measured by only a minuscule slice of the outcomes of higher education. What can be done to move away from such myopia? What metrics can be developed to measure O/E? If metrics for teaching and O/E were included, would the Anglo-American domination of the rankings continue?
5. There are many downsides to the Anglo-American hegemony. Western scholars are not learning as much as they could from scholars elsewhere, especially in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. With respect to O/E, what mechanisms exist or need to be developed to address this issue? Conversely, how can O/E scholars

in the Anglo-American sphere do more to support O/E in these three continents? For example, in Chapter 5 (“Public Research Universities in Latin America and Their Relation to Economic Development”), Moreno-Brid and Ruiz-Napoles assert that “the greatest limitation, or constraint, is the lack of university-business links.” Many Anglo-American universities have developed very strong links to business and industry. Hence, this stated constraint represents an opportunity for cross-cultural learning and sharing. Similar situations could also create opportunities for O/E scholars to provide leadership in paving the way for culture plurality in research.

In closing, I encourage readers of *JHEOE*, first, to reflect upon the five issues and questions noted. Second, consider reading *Knowledge Matters: The Public Mission of the Research University*. It is not an easy read, but I do not think you will regret the time and effort invested. Third, use the questions and issues I have raised, as well as others that might surface in a careful reading of the book, for additional thought and for conversations with your colleagues and others. Perhaps there is grist for a seminar within your university? Perhaps there is grist for a symposium within your professional association or society? Perhaps there is grist for a new research project or undertaking? Or, if you are a nonacademic, perhaps there is grist for taking a leadership role in creating a dialogue between your peers and nonacademic networks and the academe?

It is my hope that this insightful and thought-provoking book or my short review will stimulate such activities and advance our knowledge and practice of outreach and engagement, whether in a public or private research university or in some other setting.

About the Reviewer

Sam Cordes is professor emeritus at Purdue University, where he served as associate vice provost for engagement and as one of the founding codirectors of the Purdue Center for Regional Development.

