

Gilvin, A., Roberts, G. M., & Martin, C. (Eds.). (2012). *Collaborative futures: Critical reflections on publicly active graduate education*. Syracuse, NY: The Graduate School Press, Syracuse University. 442 pp.

## Review by Michael Rios and Janet Boulware

In the spirit of *Collaborative Futures: Critical Reflections on Publicly Active Graduate Education*, we reviewed this book to reflect the perspectives of two individuals at different stages of their academic careers: one a tenured professor and one a graduate student, both of whom have considerable experience working as community practitioners and collaborators with numerous faculty and students. Admittedly, *Collaborative Futures* is geared to a graduate student readership exploring, participating in, and/or struggling to carry out meaningful work in the public realm. However, this collection of essays is also a good read for faculty reflecting on their own relationships to publicly engaged scholarship. It is a reminder of both the challenges and prospects of legitimizing and fostering public scholarship in the academy, as well as in nonacademic careers beyond graduate education. After providing a brief overview, we identify issues that the book raises as a launching point to discuss publicly engaged scholarship more broadly.

The coeditors, who appear to be graduate students when the book project began, are beneficiaries of prior efforts to create institutional spaces where this type of scholarship continues to flourish. These efforts have included the work of groups such as the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities, Campus Compact, and, more recently, Imagining America, whose Publicly Active Graduate Education (PAGE) program has helped over 100 graduate students come together annually to discuss their work in a supportive environment. Not surprisingly, many of the book's contributors have been involved with Imagining America in some way, and many of the essays reflect its imprint. At times the book offers an inspiring chronicle of the public contributions universities and colleges have made over the past 100 years. However, the essays also offer reminders of the lack of progress toward integrating the goals of publicly engaged scholarship into many institutions of higher education.

The book begins with some historical context to illustrate the ways public engagement has evolved alongside and within institu-

tions of higher education. It concludes with a number of reflections by individual students, which provide a more nuanced and personal reading of public engagement from different disciplinary perspectives. The historical essays and interchapters sprinkled throughout are less effective than the critical reflections from personal perspectives. Some of the non-authored additions would have been more effective as an appendix, and the historical passages tangential to publicly engaged scholarship do nothing to strengthen the book and should have been omitted.

Many of the essays reflect the struggle for institutional legitimacy as experienced by faculty and students alike. The perennial divide between teaching, research, and service that structures most universities and colleges presents one of the biggest challenges because of the nature of publicly engaged scholarship as a continuum that bridges these three areas. The conflicts that surface during merit and promotion and tenure processes may lead faculty to express negative attitudes that can dampen students' desire to engage in publicly meaningful work. For example, both of us have heard individuals disparage community-engaged research as "lacking rigor" in comparison to the norms of disciplinary research. Although some faculty members may readily articulate the importance of public scholarship as part of their dossier, they often deter graduate students from this type of inquiry because of its professional and ethical consequences for early-career academics. In contrast, the essays in *Collaborative Futures* affirm the desire for public engagement in the academy by demonstrating how it can be done as well as identifying many of the challenges that can be overcome, especially during graduate education and while conducting fieldwork. The book also catalogues a number of summaries and historical writings, such as Ernest L. Boyer's famous essay "The Scholarship of Engagement", (1996) which collectively help to institutionally ground and avow publicly active graduate education.

*Collaborative Futures* would have benefited from a chapter on the public scholarship movement, including its victories and challenges, as well as the actors that have shaped its development. In keeping with the writing style of the book, such a chapter would have provided a more nuanced and personalized narrative celebrating the organizations, programs, and figures that have been instrumental in developing public engagement as a community of interest. It would also have demonstrated that public scholarship has been woven together by a number of disciplinary threads and institutions outside the arts and humanities. Among others, the social sciences and numerous professional graduate programs have

been contributing to public engagement efforts for over 40 years. For example, such efforts go back to the 1960s in the fields of architecture, landscape architecture, and planning and are reflected in participatory action research in both urban and rural settings.

Because it focuses primarily on the Ph.D. level, the book also omits the experiences of master's-level students. An essay or two from this perspective would be helpful, especially given that many master's students are not pursuing academic careers and often find employment with the community partners they engage while in graduate school.

Since many contributors mention the importance of nonacademic knowledge and reciprocity, there is a surprising lack of representation of community partners among the book's essays. Such partner perspectives would be valuable to readers and complement many of the book's insights. For example, contrasting "academic time" with "community time" would reveal a different set of challenges in publicly engaged scholarship and highlight the importance of communicating mutual expectations regarding project milestones and deadlines, as well as coming to agreement about project goals and expected outcomes. Sincere engagement often takes years to develop and centers around individual relationships built on reciprocity, trust, and respect. Such relationships are critical to accessing community knowledge as well as to ensuring that accurate accounts of information and data are collected. Conversely, inherent tensions characterize the "in and out" research that occurs when students cannot devote time to community requests due to their own academic pressures. One of the biggest disappointments for community partners can occur when students enter into a research relationship where the academic partner has determined goals and expectations in advance. In contrast, participatory methods of public scholarship engage community interlocutors at the outset and thus have greater potential for mutual benefit. This methodology facilitates greater engagement with community collaborators leery of spending inordinate amounts of time with graduate students with little to no gain for themselves or their organizations. Articulating how communities or the public accrue benefits from public scholarship or the pitfalls of aestheticizing engagement would offer useful insights and advance discussions of self-reflexivity, active listening, and relational thinking. These and other concerns raise critical questions about the benefits of public scholarship beyond the academy. Evaluating the public impact of various community-university partnerships, initiatives, and projects, as well as measuring the quality of citizen participa-

tion, capacity building, and policy change, are areas warranting greater attention.

The authors' focus on different academic disciplines and the reciprocity of community knowledge draws attention to crossing boundaries as a recurring theme of publicly engaged scholarship. This type of "collaborative future" is taking place today at the intersections between scholars, professionals, and citizens. Foundational to this transdisciplinary inquiry is collaboration—among scholars from different disciplinary backgrounds; with civic organizations, practitioners, and members; and at local, regional, national, and international scales. Also critical is a focus on action, whether personal or interpersonal, individual or collective. This methodological orientation is one of the field's most important scholarly contributions, especially given the growing acknowledgment that no single discipline or field of practice can adequately address society's most pressing social and environmental problems. Closer engagement with these types of transdisciplinary collaborations would also address some of the institutional challenges identified in the book. Expanding the boundaries and scales of action amplifies the work of scholars and can further demonstrate societal benefit at the core of public scholarship. As part of the growing literature on public scholarship, *Collaborative Futures: Critical Reflections on Publicly Active Graduate Education* is an important contribution to laying an educational foundation for emerging and future generations of scholars committed to addressing complex public issues we face today and still others we will confront in the future.

## References

Boyer, E., (1996). The Scholarship of engagement. *Journal of Public Service and Outreach*, 1(1), 11-20.

## About the Reviewers

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