

From the Editor...

So What? For Whom? What Difference Does Community Engagement Make?

As community-university outreach and engagement efforts are maturing, it is appropriate to ask the “so what” and “for whom” questions. What difference does community engagement make to students, to institutional partners, to program participants? More important, what difference does it make to broader communities—to higher education and beyond? In this issue’s opening article, our feature article observing the centennial year of Cooperative Extension, Nancy Franz chronicles that organization’s lessons learned in attempting to respond to the “so what” and “for whom” questions. She notes that, over time, expectations for the value provided by Extension have changed from private value for program participants to the public value of engagement for those not directly involved in the programs. That is, funding stakeholders, in particular, now expect Extension to document not only outcomes and impacts for individual program participants, but “how engagement with communities changes economic, environmental, and social conditions.”

Those of us who have attempted to measure change related to engagement with complex community-based issues know of the difficulty in measuring and articulating such public value. Franz advises attending to plans for measuring the value of engagement efforts during the proposal stages, and for including plans for articulating that value during and after the portfolio of projects addressing a critical issue.

The “so what” and “for whom” questions are addressed by the other articles in this issue as well. Three research articles explore the impact of community-engaged learning on particular populations of university students: White students engaged in a low-income African American community, first-generation and non-first-generation students, and students holding a 2-year degree.

In their study, Houshmand, Spanierman, Beer, Poteat, and Lawson examine the racial attitudes of White undergraduate students enrolled in a service-learning design studio course. Their findings highlight the importance of explicitly addressing multiculturalism in service-learning in order to better serve the communities with which students are engaged. In a large-scale study, Pelco, Ball, and Lockeman compare the effects of service-learning courses on student growth in first-generation and non-first-generation

undergraduate students. When investigating generational, racial, and financial status differences, they found that first-generation and non-first-generation male students showed the greatest differences. Their study also highlights the importance of utilizing large, diverse samples when conducting quantitative studies investigating the impact of service-learning on student development. Finally, Newell examines the differences in civic engagement between individuals with a high school degree, an associate's degree, and a bachelor's degree; her findings suggest that, although to a lesser extent than 4-year degree holders, holders of 2-year degrees do experience gains in civic engagement.

The next two articles in this issue address the “so what” question for faculty members and scholars. These studies probe the meaning and significance of community engagement as well as the challenges academics may face in adopting this orientation and pedagogy. Applying Bandura's (1997) motivational theory enabled Darby and Newman to view faculty members' motivation to persist in utilizing a service-learning pedagogy in its complexity. Their research revealed motivation not as a sum of factors that encourage or discourage faculty members' persistence in the pedagogy, but rather as a cyclical process that continually influenced faculty members' motivation with each academic service-learning experience. Through interviews with exemplars in the field, Kasworm and Abdrahim found that two interrelated but different groups emerged, representing “a university-centric enclave and a community engagement–centric enclave.” Their data relative to these two groups suggest that defining the scholarship of engagement is a socially constructed process, and engaged scholars have varied beliefs and understanding about the field based on their experiences and positions.

Eaton, Wright, Whyte, Gasteyer, and Gehrke in their essay discuss the “so what” of emerging science and technology relative to public engagement. They illustrate how the emerging nature of technologies can have stifling effects but also offer ways for scholars and practitioners to minimize these challenges to effective engagement. From her position as chair of the graduate program of Education, Society and Culture and the Institute for Civic Responsibility at Or Yehuda Israel, Irit Keynan broadly frames the “so what” question. In “Knowledge as Responsibility: Universities and Society,” she argues that authentic social responsibility is grounded in the principles of equal rights, capability, and mutual responsibility. She points out that while they claim to be committed to such principles, many universities “are in fact distanced from

these missions and from social responsibility in its broad and comprehensive meaning.”

Through their rich personal story as narrative inquiry, Tinkler, Tinkler, Gerstl-Pepin, and Mugisha speak to the “so what” for their work as a collaborative Learn and Serve America grant team. They used their experience to demonstrate how a community-based, participatory service-learning approach provides teacher education programs with opportunities to strengthen and sustain their relationships with the communities they serve while developing and embedding cultural competence related to inequities experienced by these communities into the teacher education curriculum.

Two Programs with Promise articles in this issue address the “so what” of developing innovative, comprehensive programs that provide unique benefits to both students and community partners. Rawlings-Sanaei and Sachs of Macquarie University, an Australian public teaching and research university in New South Wales, detail a university-wide signature initiative for community-based experiential learning with local, regional, and international partners. To help others considering such a strategic approach, they address issues of academic rigor, governance, and organization structure. What nonprofit organization does not need grant-writing assistance? Stevens, at Willamette University in Salem, Oregon, describes a writing-intensive course that combined a service-learning framework with grant-writing opportunities for students. She offers suggestions for how to incorporate service-learning to promote real-world application of research and writing skills for students while meeting community agency needs.

This issue features five book reviews. Written while onsite in Tanzania, Orland’s review of Agnotti, Doble, and Horrigan’s *Service Learning in Design and Planning* offers the unique perspective of a landscape professor implementing a community design-oriented study. Similarly, Haider reviews Lima’s *Building Playgrounds, Engaging Communities: Creating Safe and Happy Places for Children*, which makes a strong case for incorporating service-learning into a greater number of academic disciplines, most notably design and engineering. Calvin evaluates *Democratic Dilemmas of Teaching Service-Learning*, an edited book by Cress, Donahue, and associates that looks at the historical foundation of service-learning and its current practice. In her review of Rochester, Campbell Gosling, Penn, and Zimmeck’s *Understanding the Roots of Voluntary Action: Historical Perspectives on Current Social Policy*, Gold contends that this collection of essays on the history of voluntary action in the

United Kingdom has significant relevance and utility for today's volunteer organizations.

Finally, the issue concludes where it started by considering questions of accountability, assessment, and impact with Cecil's critique of Lagemann and Lewis's *What Is College For? The Public Purpose of Higher Education*. We, the reviewers and editor team of the Journal, thank those who are on the forefront in pursuing answers to the "so what" and "for whom" questions through their research, evaluation, and reviews. The seeking process as well as the actual documentation of the public value of engagement can, as Franz writes, "help universities and their community partners find common ground on what matters to academics, students, practitioners, administrators, elected officials, and community members."

With best regards,
Lorilee R. Sandmann
Editor

Reference

Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. New York, NY: Freeman.