

Gasman, M. (Ed.). (2016). *Academics going public: How to write and speak beyond academe*. New York, NY: Routledge. 144 pp.

## Review by Kristina Killgrove

At a time when government funding for academic research is quickly eroding, and while more funding organizations are asking applicants for their broader impacts and importance to the general public, professors are increasingly becoming interested in outreach. It is into this milieu that *Academics Going Public*, edited by Marybeth Gasman, delves in order to help scholars find their voice and speak out about myriad issues.

In her introduction, Gasman asserts that public outreach is a “social justice issue” (p. 2). By this, she means that everyone needs to engage the public more fully in their scholarship and that there is a timely need for increased diversity, as the majority of well-known public intellectuals have been White men. In particular, Gasman sees the shifting sands of new media on the internet as a place where scholars with an interest in outreach can make a difference without significant barriers. With the introduction serving as a north star, Gasman has lined up a series of short, practical, and easily digested chapters that provide basic guidance to the scholar who wants to talk to a reporter, write an op-ed or a press release, deliver a public talk, or engage on social media.

Four of the chapters constitute advice about more traditional approaches to communicating with the public through media. In Chapter 2, Scott Jaschik ably answers the question of why academics should speak to the press: “Interaction with the media can create regular evidence of the benefits of higher education” (p. 11). To successfully interact, Jaschik recommends that scholars try to think like journalists in writing their websites or blogs, and to figure out the potential angle of a story. Kat Stein, in Chapter 8, provides similar suggestions for writing an influential press release, including minimizing jargon, being responsive, and building and working a network. Chapter 3, by Donald Heller, covers op-ed writing, and he focuses on relevance and timing in pitching a piece to a publisher. And in Chapter 4, Terrell Strayhorn provides advice for anyone who wants to write and deliver a short, impactful public speech such as a TED talk. As a group, these four articles convey important points for any academic to keep in mind when aiming for

more traditional media: less jargon, more discussion of the impacts of scholarship. These chapters also offer suggestions for both the introverted and extroverted among us. Jaschik's and Heller's articles focus on writing, which may appeal to those who don't want to put themselves too far out in the public eye; Strayhorn's advice may ring truer for academics who like being in front of an audience.

Another set of four chapters deals with outreach and engagement on social media. Dafina-Lazarus Stewart provides useful help in crafting one's online scholarly identity in Chapter 6, because "people won't learn from scholars they don't know" (p. 74). Impostor syndrome is one barrier that many academics need to overcome before launching their brand online, but Stewart also suggests building a network of both professional colleagues and the general public through Facebook, Twitter, and blogs. In Chapter 7, a series of authors discuss how to use social media to further a research goal, such as distributing surveys to, in particular, under-represented populations. Although this chapter seems a suboptimal fit in a volume devoted primarily to communicating ideas, rather than engaging in research, Johnson and colleagues do emphasize the importance of having a personal-professional network, which can aid in distribution of a survey but which is also a key to outreach in general. In Chapter 5, Richard Reddick tackles ways that scholars can use social media to promote their research, because he believes that "social media presence is a 21st century literacy" (p. 56). Although many scholars are uncomfortable with the "blurring of public and private" (p. 59), Reddick encourages them to use social media to magnify their latest publications, amplify their work outside academia, and clarify topics that might have lost their nuance. This chapter will be particularly useful for early-career academics who want to justify their outreach or use of social media in their bid for tenure and promotion. Marybeth Gasman, in Chapter 9, addresses ways that scholars engaged in outreach can deal with hecklers, controversy, and backlash. "Don't feed the trolls" is always good advice, but Gasman argues that "their issue is with your willingness to speak out in general" (p. 124) and that the benefits of this far outweigh such potential drawbacks. Scholars, she notes, need to make their voices heard but should also recognize when they are out of their depth.

In her conclusion, Gasman expands further on some of these ideas and places the onus of acceptance of outreach back on scholars themselves. "Many academics fear they will be penalized for having a national voice and publishing in popular media outlets" (p. 127), she writes, but the ability to change that lies with us. "Faculty

members should also be rewarded in the tenure process for invited talks, keynotes, TED talks, and other public presentations of their work, as these venues take scholarship to new levels” (p. 128), she argues. Within a system of shared governance, such as academia, faculty can choose to change tenure and promotion guidelines and to better reward those willing to do both peer-reviewed work and public outreach.

Whether a reader is more comfortable with traditional media or with reaching out through social media, this compilation has something for everyone. My one criticism of the volume is that the arrangement of the chapters could have been better considered. For example, the chapter on writing press releases is stuck between chapters on social media and dealing with trolls, when it more logically fits nearer the chapter about writing op-eds. As a whole, however, this series of brief case studies written in the first person makes for an approachable book, and each chapter ends with “quick tips” that scholars interested in public outreach, even those who already have experience in the field, would do well to consult regularly. This book was written primarily by and aimed at scholars in the field of higher education, but the lessons contained in it are applicable across all disciplines.

## About the Reviewer

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