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Hoffman, A. J. (2021). *The Engaged Scholar: Expanding the Impact of Academic Research in Today's World.* Stanford University Press. 184 pp.

Review by Sheila A. Martin

In *The Engaged Scholar*, Andrew Hoffman asks us to consider the question, "Why did you choose to become a professor, and what kind of academic do you want to be?" (p. 23). In my case, my experiences prior to academia set me on a path that predisposed me to a particular academic role. As a research economist at RTI International, my job was to answer questions posed by federal and state agencies, utilities, or foundations. A common question was something like, "How much will it cost for industry to implement this new regulatory measure, how will the cost affect the price of the final product, and how does that compare to the degree of added health or safety it might provide?"

I learned how to use the tools of economic analysis to answer these sometimes very complex questions. When I became an economic policy advisor for a governor, my academic and research background empowered me to distill and present the academic science to answer similar very practical questions, while I also understood, due to my political science and policy background, how to anticipate stakeholders' positions and address stakeholder concerns.

When I finally entered academia well into my career, it was unlikely that I would be a star of A-level, high-impact journals. Not only had I developed my career in a different direction, but my responsibilities managing an applied policy research institute simply didn't compel me to conduct theoretical or narrowly focused empirical research. Instead, I adopted the role that Hoffman mentions, as developed by Pidgeon and Fischhoff (2011), of a decision scientist, integrating and distilling information about the potential consequences of policy decisions.

I attained tenure and the rank of full professor despite my lack of A-level publications—or perhaps because I understood my strengths and used them to fulfill the engagement mission of my institution. I was lucky enough to work for a university and in a field that valued and rewarded engaged, applied research and public communication.

But not everyone is that fortunate. Many academics struggle to balance their desire for a career that includes engaging the public in their work with the pressure to publish in A-level, high-impact journals year after year, with little time left to engage audiences who could benefit from their ability to distill, interpret, and communicate important and policy-relevant findings from their research.

With this book, Hoffman aims to inspire, support, and celebrate the work of scholars who are dissatisfied with narrowly defined roles of academics and the standards used to define their success. He speaks directly to those who understand the importance of cultivating a scientifically literate and curious society, but who encounter the barriers of academic structures and norms that impede their progress. He speaks to scholars who want to do more than publish papers in academic journals read by a small sliver of the already informed population, despite the importance of high-impact journals on the progress of their careers. These scholars crave a broader conversation about the results of their discoveries and the satisfaction of knowing that they influence decisions large and small.

Hoffman is also speaking to university leaders—presidents, provosts, deans, and others—who maintain the infrastructure of academic career advancement. Although he represents and reflects the desires and ambitions of those who seek out broader engagement, he also appreciates and supports administrators who are working to change structures, traditions, and attitudes

that inhibit those who seek broader engagement. He illuminates a way forward for those working to clear the path for those interested in engaged scholarship.

In today's divisive, confusing, and cynical political and social environments, connecting with an audience beyond academia isn't just a fun diversion from a scholar's focus; rather, it is necessary to our democratic process and key to keeping academia relevant. How can voters, policymakers, business leaders, and consumers make informed choices without understanding the difference between fact and opinion, science and fantasy, the possible and the impossible?

Hoffman places the book in the context of the crises we have faced over the past few years and the misinformation and confusion that have divided the country. Protests over Covid-19 restrictions reflect a lack of appreciation for the years of scientific discovery on which the vaccines were built. Dismissal of the threat of global warming results from misunderstanding how scientists formulate and test climate models, and how rapidly scientists are improving these models' ability to predict how global climate change will affect all of Earth's systems, including social systems.

Hoffman also points out that not every scholar can or should take on this role. He discusses the diversity of scientific roles within the science ecosystem. The ecosystem includes those who deliver specific scientific findings, decision scientists who excel at determining what is most relevant to public decision making, science communicators who share those findings in an approachable way, and organizers who can orchestrate the process of public engagement (p. 21). He imagines an academic enterprise that creates this ecosystem and appreciates and rewards each of these roles. Hoffman further points out that academic leaders can assess the balance of these roles at the department or college level, just as they might assess the balance between teaching, research, and service at the department or college level. Thus, although not every individual must take on a public engagement role, every department, institute, or college should have an ecosystem that performs a complete set of academic functions, including engaging with the public.

In Chapter 1, Hoffman describes why engaged scholarship matters and what motivates faculty to become engaged. He cites public scientists such as Jane Lubchenco in noting that we have a responsibility to hold a mirror up to society and to say things that people may not want to hear. He puts that responsibility in the historical context of science and technology policy, and points to the linear applied research model that led to the rise of research funding after Vannevar Bush's *The Endless Frontier* (1945). The linear model of basic to applied research on which this policy was based failed to break down the disciplinary silos that prevent the transdisciplinary research necessary to address the complex policy problems perplexing policymakers. More realistic models of innovation introduced later by authors such as Stokes (1997) have begun breaking down these silos. At the same time, calls for a more engaged university, such as those of the Kellogg Commission (1997) and Michael Crow and William Dabars (2015), reflect the emergence of a new cadre of faculty determined to address the current deficiency of effective public science communication. Hoffman again quotes Lubchenco, who warns that academia's role is not to dictate, which would filter scientific results through a values lens, but merely to inform (p. 17) with the intention of allowing decision makers to process that information using their own values and those of the society they represent.

What stands in the way of faculty who are dedicated to taking their scientific findings to the public to inform public debate and policy decisions? In Chapter 2 Hoffman argues that the current system of incentives and rewards at universities and the culture that it has generated is a significant barrier. Faculty are rewarded for publishing in A-level, high-impact, scholarly journals that are read by a small number of their colleagues. These journals serve as a platform for scholarly peers to critique methods, debate logic, and surface alternative explanations and conclusions. Although discourse on this platform is useful for ensuring replicability, honesty, and integrity in the science, it does not inform the public or decision makers who, for the most part, neither read those journals nor speak the language in which they are written. But finding the time, support, and training to take their findings to the public can not only be difficult but may also be counter to academics' self-interest because it may not contribute to their career advancement. Thus, faculty may find it easier to simply set aside public engagement activities in favor of working

on their next publication to ensure their advancement on the path toward promotion and tenure.

And yet, many academics find deep meaning and satisfaction in careers in which they step outside academia to offer the public the benefit of their findings and their understanding of how the world works. In Chapter 3, Hoffman explains why and how many scholars pursue the rewards of public engagement. Public communication and engagement require skills that are often not part of an academic's training. Some possess natural talent in engagement; however, most need to invest in learning the science of public communication and practicing the skills required to be effective in engaging with the public. These skills include building trust and authenticity, distilling knowledge into wisdom, putting science in a context and language that is relatable to the public, and understanding the limits of one's own capacity to field controversy.

Hoffman spends some time discussing the difference between sharing knowledge and imparting wisdom because it has implications for the degree of vulnerability we must bring to the work of public engagement. Knowledge can be shared without revealing much about one's own journey or struggle to understand the implications of a set of findings. But sharing wisdom requires that we reveal how we contextualize those findings based on our lifetime of observation and experience. Whereas knowledge can be gleaned from a table of statistics, wisdom can be shared only by revealing a part of our personal story that explains our relationship to the phenomena we study.

Perhaps the most important skill academics must bring to public engagement, according to Hoffman, is humility. Gaining the trust of our audience requires that we be open to their experiences, knowledge, wisdom, and interpretations. Public engagement gives us an opportunity to add their experiences and interpretations to our own. Broadening our understanding in this way can improve others' receptiveness to our message, leading not only to improved policy but also to a profoundly rewarding career.

Many academics shy away from using social media to engage the public in their work. In Chapter 4, Hoffman makes the case for using social media not only to bring their research results to the public, but also to fight the "truth decay" and echo chamber that social media can become. He offers academics a road map of technologies, tools, and platforms that determine the effectiveness of using social media for public engagement. Importantly, he provides some alternative metrics that scholars can use to demonstrate the impact they are having beyond the academic audience. These tools can support the movement to gain broader acceptance of public engagement as a legitimate addition to an academic career that can be quantified and rewarded.

An academic need not delay their entry into public engagement until after they've achieved tenure. In Chapter 5, Hoffman describes how public engagement can enhance each stage in an academic career and contribute to one's satisfaction throughout that career. In the recent past it may have been unusual—particularly for a young scholar—to pursue a career with significant engagement, but this is changing. More universities are staking their reputations on being engaged institutions and are providing support. That support might include an infrastructure of engagement that includes staff, training, and changes in promotion and tenure policy along with innovation in the metrics that make quantifying public impact possible. Hoffman argues that academic culture, beyond individual universities, is changing as these innovations reach accrediting agencies and other institutions that set the rules of the game for the institutional rankings and other signals of prestige heeded by university governing boards.

Hoffman succeeds in motivating those interested in practicing engaged scholarship and offering support and advice to those trying to change culture within a department, college, or university. His call to action points to the rejection of science and the public's questioning of the value of academia, characterizing these trends as an "existential crisis" (p. 5). To solve them, the academy needs to accept its role in public engagement, or watch its relevance and support continue to wane.

What I didn't find in this book was more discussion of how academics might better leverage reciprocal relationships with the public. Engagement shouldn't be simply communication, but a willingness to acknowledge an academic's blind spots, or more usefully, the areas where the knowledge of the community is important to having a broader impact. Hoffman acknowledges the importance of humility, but

reciprocity is not an overall theme of the book. Rather, he seems to privilege academic forms of knowledge with the argument that we must learn to communicate that knowledge. Even though he tips his hat to the possibility that combining academic with other forms of knowledge can be powerful, this reciprocity received very little space. Readers looking for advice on how to build more reciprocal relationships with the public in engaged research and teaching might refer to the extensive literature on the subject, starting with Kliewer et al. (2010), who explored how power dynamics interfere with reciprocity.

Nevertheless, this is a great little book, and I thoroughly enjoyed reading it. Hoffman makes his main points easy to access—his own experience with approachable writing really shines in this quick read that will serve to inspire and bolster any faculty member or administrator passionate about engagement but unsure whether the results are worth the investment.

Coming back to Hoffman's original question—"Why did you choose to become a professor, and what kind of academic do you want to be?"—this book might just make it a bit easier for more scholars to choose the satisfying and impactful path of public engagement.

About the Reviewer

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