

From Maverick to Mainstream: The Scholarship of Engagement

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Abstract

A significant and growing number of universities across the country are pursuing the agenda of public and civic engagement and giving serious consideration to resultant faculty roles. Along with new university commitment come new definitions of scholarship, including the scholarship of engagement. The scholarship of engagement continues to emerge and expand as campuses manifest context-driven characteristics reflecting the correspondence between their notion of scholarship and their individual history, priorities, circumstances, and location. However, from its earliest definition as scholarship, engagement has presented challenges to higher education. This article presents work that is national in scope and that addresses these challenges by providing faculty with institutional models and resources to advance the documentation, evaluation, and review of the scholarship of engagement.

The Faculty Experience

Professor Ron Silva has worked in professional development schools for most of his career. From his days as a graduate student, the collaborative arrangements between universities and public schools made sense to him as an aspect of teacher education. His career satisfactions have been intertwined with mutual benefits to both his School of Education and also to the teachers and principal of the public school where he spends much of his time.

In order to be accepted in his academic home, Dr. Silva focused his research on the impact of the university partnership on the teaching practices in the public school and university classrooms. Early in his career, Dr. Silva began designing his research collaboratively with his public school partners and a few of his university peers. Dr. Silva is a determined and articulate scholar, and fortunately for him, his campus has revised its promotion and tenure guidelines to reflect new faculty roles and to reward new forms of scholarship. He successfully forged his way through the tenure and merit systems, but he was consistently forced to respond to challenges such as:

“You need some single-authored publications.”

“Your methodology needs more rigor.”

“Your research agenda seems to shift around—different questions every few years.”

“Who is the audience for your work?”

“Are these recognized refereed journals?”

Dr. Silva recently described, with great frustration, the need for “reviewers who understand” his own scholarship, and he has been seeking out colleagues on the national scene who are faced with similar challenges.

Assistant Professor Nancy Longley struggles to maintain her idealism—regularly reminding herself of why she chose academia. Little doubt troubles her when she’s working with her small business initiatives group in the inner city—providing technical assistance, conducting seminars, placing and supervising student interns, and relaxing with the new men and women entrepreneurs in the slowly developing neighborhoods of poverty. But her early attempts to study the emerging businesses were encouraged by her community colleagues and discouraged by her faculty colleagues.

Last year Dr. Longley faced the review, tenure, and promotion process with great trepidation and she was at a loss to identify external reviewers for her work. Dr. Longley’s reports and data documenting the community changes connected to her business initiatives group were not considered in her case for promotion and tenure, but her journal publications were convincing. Her community presentations had significant impact in the inner city neighborhoods and city government. Dr. Longley’s colleagues skimmed over such impact in their search for national and disciplinary conferences in her dossier. Thus, on campus, Dr. Longley struggles and yearns to talk with colleagues about her important work and to collaborate with peers in addressing inner city needs. She questions her future in higher education.

Professor Jeanine Chin is a full professor in biology. She achieved her status on a very traditional path of continuing her graduate research agenda, expanding and extending her studies with new foci and occasional collaboration with colleagues across the country. With tenure in hand, Dr. Chin began to represent the university and her department as a member of an advisory board for the city zoo. Her participation gradually escalated and she began to use her biology expertise, her university resources, and a related knowledge base of science education. Her research focus shifted

drastically and her courses have been influenced by what she and her students are experiencing and learning at the zoo. Reciprocally, Dr. Chin's influence is clearly evident in the zoo's educational programs, brochures, displays, and even approaches to marketing.

Dr. Chin sees her work as a new form of scholarship and submits examples from the zoo each year for her post-tenure review and for merit considerations. She longs to support and encourage junior faculty to join her in her community collaboration. She hesitates with a concern for their future and the knowledge that her own work is looked upon as "less than" traditional scholarship. Even with a newly revised reward system for scholarship at her university, Dr. Chin feels that her scholarship is not understood and not well rewarded.

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Changing Faculty Roles and Reward Systems: New Challenges

Fortunately for Drs. Silva, Longley, and Chin, a significant number of universities are pursuing the agenda of civic engagement with community and giving serious consideration to new roles for faculty. Ron Silva will find a growing number of colleagues working as he does to "reconnect the generation of academic knowledge to the needs of a knowledge-dependent society" (Driscoll and Lynton 1999, ix). At Boyer's urging (1990), more universities are becoming vigorous partners in addressing the complex issues of society, and, on some campuses, Nancy Longley's isolation and lack of reward are being replaced with status and institutional recognition. With new commitments by universities, new definitions of scholarship have emerged including the scholarship of engagement, outreach, or professional service. The scholarship of engagement continues to emerge and expand as campuses manifest context-driven characteristics reflecting the correspondence between their notion of scholarship and their individual history, priorities, circumstances, and location. More and more campuses are embracing a broader vision of scholarship that includes the application and dissemination of knowledge that Jeanine Chin is practicing.

From its earliest definition as scholarship, engagement presented challenges to higher education. Once defined for a campus, it was woven into guidelines for faculty promotion and tenure. The challenge, then, is for faculty to document the new scholarship. A National Project for the Documentation of Professional Service and Outreach, funded by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, addressed this need. With the insights

and efforts of sixteen faculty and four administrators from multiple campuses (Indiana University Purdue University at Indianapolis, Michigan State University, Portland State University, and University of Memphis) and the leadership of Ernest

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Lynton and Amy Driscoll, the participants engaged in the process of documentation to provide guidelines, examples, and a framework. Their work, *Making Outreach Visible: A Guide to Documenting Professional Service and Outreach* (Driscoll and Lynton 1999) contributes much to campus efforts to reformulate faculty roles and rewards systems to recognize and reward the scholarship of engagement. The *Guide* provides actual faculty documentation examples, resources, and specific guidance; poses questions and issues for campus exploration; and encourages diversity of documentation within a context of common criteria and guidelines. The *Guide* can serve as a resource both early in an institution’s reform process and later on when explicit “how to” instruction is needed.

Documenting the Scholarship of Engagement

The best documentation is that which most effectively communicates and makes visible the evidence of the scholarship of engagement. When completed, the National Project for the Documentation of Professional Service and Outreach provided supportive recommendations for faculty seeking to provide such scholarly evidence. The project participants proposed a documentation framework with three major components: *purpose*, *process*, and *outcomes*. A brief elaboration on each component serves to expand the concept of civic, community, or public engagement as scholarship as well as adding description to the related documentation process.

To describe *purpose*, faculty like Ron Silva refer to a university, school, or department mission that supports engagement work.

Dr. Silva's campus has a mission statement that describes "partnerships with community" and his School of Education has a similar commitment; thus he has support for his choice of scholarship. He articulates his own expertise and experience as focused on university/school partnerships as well as the expertise contributed by the public schools with whom he works. Again, Dr. Silva makes a case for using and expanding his professional expertise. He also describes the needs of the public schools along with those of the School of Education as a rationale for engaging in partnerships. The *purpose* section of his dossier is intended to provide a foundation for his scholarship of engagement.

The second component, *process*, is a record of the design and methodology used by faculty in their engagement work. Much of Jeanine Chin's work with the zoo draws upon her knowledge of approaches previously documented in her research. She describes them well when she submits evidence of her engagement and explains adaptations made in the process of collaboration with community partners at the zoo. In the process section, adaptation is an ongoing need because the community has few of the controls common to traditional research. In response to the need for reflection on the part of the faculty, Dr. Chin consistently ponders the new questions raised by her community engagement and highlights the insights that emerge from her collaboration.

The third component, *outcomes*, is multifaceted, with descriptions of benefits to the community partner, institution and unit, the students, the discipline or profession, and the individual faculty member. Nancy Longley has little trouble coming up with long lists of those benefits and easily documents them with records of her community presentations and reports, data showing the influence of her small business initiatives group on the community, and syllabi and student work from her courses. She has begun to focus her national conference presentations on the application of "best practice" in her profession as a way of contributing to her disciplinary knowledge base.

Although faculty like Dr. Longley experiment with documentation and provide rich examples for colleagues—the National Project supports efforts with a framework and guidelines—faculty continue to struggle with the documentation process. Their efforts are consistently plagued with concern related to a lack of understanding and acknowledgment for a different form of scholarship by their peers. The question of "who will evaluate" this documentation adds tension to the documentation process.

Reviewing and Supporting the Scholarship of Engagement

Many campuses committed to a substantive study of engagement, made significant revisions to their reward systems, and began to communicate with clarity the importance of faculty engagement as scholarship. Yet, with all of the advances in higher education, a final challenge remains. There is still a strong need for informed review of this new form of scholarship, similar to the need encountered by Drs. Silva, Longley, and Chin. They are among the pioneers in the scholarship of engagement, but they suffer the risk of not being understood or rewarded because their colleagues on campus or in their disciplines do not know how to evaluate nontraditional scholarship. Upon completion of their documentation projects, the sixteen faculty who participated in the National Project reached a major conclusion about the need for a national pool of peer reviewers who could provide credible, standardized assessment for the scholarship of engagement. In response to this growing critical need, the National Review Board for the Scholarship of Engagement was established in 2000.

The National Review Board for the Scholarship of Engagement

The National Review Board for the Scholarship of Engagement was created to review and evaluate the scholarship of engagement of faculty who are preparing for annual review, promotion, and tenure. The board is composed of individuals who represent varied institutions of higher education and a wide range of disciplines, as well as the roles of program directors, vice presidents, provosts, presidents, and tenured faculty. The board members are leaders in the institutionalization of community engagement, service learning, and professional service. Board members commit to review and evaluate faculty portfolios for three years and collaboratively engage in preparation for the review process. With funding from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation and guidance from the leadership of Amy Driscoll and Lorilee Sandmann, the National Review Board is supported by the East/West Clearinghouses for the Scholarship of Engagement.

Drawing heavily from the work of Glassick, Huber, and Maeroff (1997) and work of other institutions such as Michigan State University, Indiana University Purdue University at Indianapolis, and Portland State University (which developed assessment criteria for the broader conception of scholarship), the National Review Board agreed on a set of criteria as outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. National Review Board Evaluation Criteria

Goals/Questions

- Does the scholar clearly state the basic purposes of the work?
- Does the scholar define objectives that are realistic and achievable?
- Does the scholar identify intellectual and significant questions in the field?
- Is there an “academic fit” with the scholar’s role departmental/university mission?

Context of theory, literature, “best practices”

- Does the scholar show an understanding of existing scholarship in field?
- Does the scholar bring the necessary skills to the work?
- Does the scholar bring together the resources necessary to move the project forward?
- Is the work intellectually compelling?

Methods

- Does the scholar use methods appropriate to the goals or questions?
- Does the scholar apply effectively the methods selected?
- Does the scholar modify procedures in response to changing circumstances?
- Does the scholar describe rationale for selection of methods in relation to context and issue?

Results

- Does the scholar achieve the goals?
- Does the scholar’s work add consequentially to the field (significance)?
- Does the scholar’s work open additional areas for further exploration?
- Does the scholar’s work achieve impact or change? Are those outcomes evaluated?

Communication/Dissemination

- Does the scholar use a suitable style and effective organization to present the work?
- Does the scholar use appropriate forums for communicating work to the intended audience?
- Does the scholar communicate/disseminate to multiple audiences?
- Does the scholar present information with clarity and integrity?

Reflective Critique

- Does the scholar critically evaluate the work?
- Does the scholar bring an appropriate breadth of evidence to the critique?
- Does the scholar use evaluation to improve the quality of future work?
- Does the scholar synthesize information across previous criteria?
- Does the scholar learn and describe future directions?

Source: The National Review Board for the Scholarship of Engagement, 2000.

A look at Drs. Silva, Longley, and Chin's documentation serves to highlight aspects of the evaluation criteria and to demonstrate the congruence between the criteria and the framework proposed by the National Project. Ron Silva describes his intent to study the teaching practices of both the university and the public school and to explore the reciprocal benefits of their partnership while supervising student teachers, providing workshops for teachers, and coordinating the partnership. As he presented his *goals*, he also articulated the "fit" between his work in the public school, his role as coordinator of the partnership, and the mission of his School of Education.

Jeanine Chin uses her strong research and development background and achievements as a *context of theory, literature, and "best practices"* for her community engagement. Little doubt exists that her skills and understanding are appropriate and even exemplary for the collaboration with and contributions to the zoo in her references to both theoretical and research foundations of her work.

Nancy Longley's *methods* for working with her community business partners emerge from her professional expertise as well as from her collaboration with civic leaders and business partners. She describes both the community context of poverty and segregation and issues of gentrification and economic growth as a rationale for approaching the initiatives group in the way she chooses.

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The *results* of all three faculty scholars' civic engagement involve impact and change for community and campus. The teacher education program where Ron Silva works has been consistently improved by the insights of his partnership. Nancy Longley's small business initiatives group has documented impact on the economic status of its neighborhood. Jeanine Chin's contributions to the zoo provide exciting information and enhanced learning for her students.

All three faculty scholars struggle with the *communication/dissemination* of their work. Nancy Longley finds herself developing multiple forms of the same presentation in order to be effective with both community audiences and her national association audiences. Ron Silva moves between his public school colleagues and his university colleagues on an almost daily basis and occasionally talks

to colleagues across the state. He must ensure that his communication is without jargon for the clarity that is essential to disseminate his ideas.

With respect to *reflective critique*, Jeanine Chin consistently evaluates her contributions to the zoo's educational program. Although she builds upon her strong experience and expertise, she feels she is constantly learning and facing new questions. Her dossier is often puzzling to her immediate colleagues because her documentation is full of questioning and presents her own critique of the contributions acknowledged in her work with the zoo. Recommendations for her own future efforts are supported by studying her work in the context of the knowledge base of her profession.

At first glance, the evaluation criteria may look simple and straightforward, but they are rigorous and demanding. Faculty find that the criteria are not easily met by merely engaging in community work and partnerships. The criteria truly ensure the scholarly aspect of engagement and can serve as significant guides for multiple levels of the scholarship of engagement: for the initial level of decision making when faculty make a commitment to civic engagement, for the planning and implementation level, for the documentation level, and for the review/evaluation level.

Using the National Review Board for the Scholarship of Engagement

For those institutions that request a review of their faculty's documentation of the scholarship of engagement, the process of submission requires a preview letter to inform the clearinghouse personnel of the intent to submit materials. Institutions are encouraged to do so one month in advance of the actual submission. An identification of reviewers based on availability and background and made well in advance of submission can ensure the timely and informed review of faculty materials. Upon receipt of the faculty member's portfolio and support materials, reviewers will have six weeks to critically review and provide written feedback on the content of the materials and to make recommendations to the university review committees. Faculty whose portfolios are submitted to the National Review Board for the Scholarship of Engagement will receive written feedback on the content of the materials and the documentation. Guidelines for preview letters and portfolio development and the criteria for review are available from the clearinghouses and on the web site at <http://www.universityengagement-scholarship.org>.

Continuing Development and the Need For Inquiry

While the National Review Board is available to provide substantive external peer review, much remains to be done to support the continued dialogue about and practice of engagement as part of the academic scholarly enterprise. The work points to further inquiry about who is actually performing scholarly engagement, what form it takes, and how it is presented, assessed, and counted. For example:

Who are the faculty involved in engagement and seeking reviews of their scholarly engagement? Are they faculty primarily from applied or professional disciplines? What are their assigned roles? What past experiences or models have led them to connect their scholarship with the community? How are faculty best prepared to think about and take on community-based scholarship or “use-inspired basic research” (*Stokes 1997*)?

What are faculty doing under the rubric of the scholarship of engagement? Are faculty documenting their actual engagement activities or the *scholarship* of their engagement? Is the work primarily teaching, research, or service, or is it an integration of all three? How is the case typically made?

How is the work assessed? Are the National Review Board criteria workable or do they need further interpretation through the value system of community engagement? Can the criteria ultimately influence best practice? What are the evidences of impact? To what extent are faculty using traditional scholarly artifacts (peer-reviewed journal articles, national scholarly presentations, grant dollars generated)? What other artifacts are provided? How does the requesting institution use the National Review Board’s assessment?

Answers to these questions will be revealed over time as faculty scholars work in communities and discover clear and convincing ways to demonstrate their scholarship of engagement within portfolios of their work. As scholars-in-community become “mainstream” and the value of their scholarly work is more fully understood, recognized, and valued, their days of being “mavericks” will fade and engagement will take its place among the panoply of meaningful and authentic forms of scholarship.

The authors continue the work of the clearinghouses and National Review Board. If your campus is contemplating a change in faculty roles and rewards or has already revised promotion and tenure guidelines to reward the scholarship of engagement, the clearinghouses and the National Review Board can guide, support, and affirm your efforts.

References

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Together they codirect the East/West Clearinghouses for the Scholarship of Engagement, funded by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation. The East/West Clearinghouses sponsor the National Review Board to provide external peer review and evaluation of the scholarship of engagement. The clearinghouses also provide consultation, training, and technical assistance to campuses that are seeking to develop or strengthen systems in support of the scholarship of engagement. The clearinghouses sponsor forums, programs, and conferences on topics related to the scholarship of engagement, and provide a faculty mentoring program with opportunities for less experienced faculty to learn from the outreach experiences of more seasoned scholars. Both the clearinghouses and the National Review Board are offered in partnership with the American Association of Higher Education, National Campus Compact, the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges, and the New England Resource Center for Higher Education. The clearinghouses can be accessed at <http://www.universityengagement-scholarship.org>.