Marissa L. Diener and Hank Liese, eds. *Finding Meaning in Civically Engaged Scholarship: Personal Journeys, Professional Experiences.* Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, Inc., 2009.

Review by Loretta Singletary

*T*his collection of essays describes the rewards and challenges of civically engaged scholarship as perceived by nine faculty members representing eight different disciplines at the University of Utah. These faculty members came together as the Civically Engaged Scholarly Cohort (CESC) to explore and practice civic engagement through service-learning and community-based research. Early in their collaboration, they recognized their need to pursue civic engagement through teaching and research as they discovered they were unable to separate their professional from their personal sense of self. They discovered that they shared similar motives to inspire their students to become civically engaged, including moral, spiritual, and political factors that composed who they were not only as academic faculty members, but as human beings.

The essays reflect upon the role of service-learning in addressing complex civic issues, applying academic theory to solve real-world problems, and facilitating student exploration of self and personal identity. More interesting is the surprising candor with which the authors share how service-learning experiences influence their personal self-discovery. The authors provide readers with a hard look inside the struggle many faculty members experience in their quest to attain tenure while striving to find meaning in their work. At least for this group of academics, experiencing a connection to community is the key to finding meaning in their personal and professional lives. They report that service-learning, as a practical form of civically engaged scholarship, provides a medium through which to realize a sense of purpose, while satisfying the constraints of the academic institutional framework that is focused on achieving merit, resulting in tenure and promotion.

The book is divided into two parts. Part 1 features nine essays or chapters that depict the journey of individual faculty members discovering their passion for civic engagement. Part 2 provides specific examples of civic engagement in action; reports the impacts of civic engagement on students and communities; and discusses the challenges involved in implementing effective civically engaged scholarship.

Three themes emerge in Part 1. First, the majority of these nine scholars perceive that the university environment undervalues

teaching, particularly outreach teaching and service, as compared with research. These scholars indicate they felt that they risked their chances for promotion and tenure in their pursuit of outreach service and research. They lament that traditional academic expectations for gauging faculty success continue to focus on numbers of articles authored individually, thus encouraging and rewarding egocentric, rather than, collaborative behavior.

Second, an interdisciplinary approach is critical, even necessary, to effective civically-engaged scholarship. These scholars share their journey of self-discovery as they apply academic theory to address real-world problems and issues. In fact, they ask the reader to consider the role of the university in addressing problems that require multiple disciplines to work together to explore the development of theories that necessarily permeate boundaries between academic departments and colleges. These scholars additionally argue that civically engaged scholarship must involve nonacademic partners since it is motivated by real problems rather than academic theory. Partnerships forged between academics and non-academics require the university to accept community knowledge as a critical resource even though it weakens the notion of the university academic as expert.

Third, civically-engaged scholarship provides a vehicle for exploring and discovering the personal self while maturing the professional self. These scholars describe coming to terms with their inability to divorce their personal, spiritual selves from their academic selves and cite primarily personal reasons for incorporating service-learning into their teaching and research. Through their search for meaningful learning experiences to connect students with community problems, the authors find their personal identity—a sense of self apart from their academic discipline, departmental politics, and business-as-usual in an ivory tower. They reflect upon their own learning experiences and increasing awareness as they strive to nurture student awareness about community issues. As these scholars build relationships with community partners and students to implement service-learning, they discover aspects of their personal character and morals. They confess, to their surprise and terror, their realization of their need for control and their subsequent efforts to relinquish control of their students and the learning process. Readers who are educators will likely find these accounts endearing if not enlightening.

The essays featured in Part 1 are well-written and provide refreshingly honest and inspirational views of the role that civically-engaged scholarship plays in the lives of these faculty

members. Most of the essays emphasize the disparity between university expectations for academic success and the personal drive to pursue civically-engaged scholarship, which may discourage some academics from exploring service-learning and community-based research. It should be noted, however, that the authors strive to balance this message by emphasizing the personal and professional growth they experience through their pursuit of civically-engaged scholarship—benefits that they unanimously agree exceed the risks posed by the tenure and promotion process. A few of these scholars report that they were able to satisfy the traditional expectations of the university simply by strategically coordinating their civic engagement activities with their scholarly activities. For one author, this translated to methodically explaining his journey in his tenure and promotion application, convincing his colleagues of the academic credibility of his civic engagement teaching and research activities.

Perhaps the most important information readers may glean from Part 2 is related to scholarly efforts to evaluate the impact of service-learning on students and communities. The essays present case studies that provide readers with a balanced review of impacts based on feedback from students and community partners in addition to the scholars' personal perceptions. Readers who are considering replicating these types of service-learning projects will find the lessons learned and shared in this collection of essays invaluable. Specific impacts on students reported are numerous and impressive.

The scholars report that through their service-learning experience, students learn how to work with diverse groups to address high-stakes, competing interests as well as to facilitate discussion about complex issues. Students also increase their collaborative problem-solving skills, knowledge about local issues, self-confidence, self-esteem, social and networking skills, relationship-building skills, appreciation of the role of relationships in problem solving, and appreciation of diverse views. Reported community impacts include perceived increases in trust between community and university, increases in social capital between university and community organizations, and improved perception of the value of universities for exploring and addressing the underlying causes of society's problems.

The scholars provide honest discussions concerning the numerous challenges posed by service-learning, one of which is the time demand that this pedagogical tool places on faculty members, students, and community partners alike. They also note that many

students are uncomfortable and unprepared when they encounter difficult and adversarial personalities in the course of their service-learning experience. Because many students work and have families, they often lack sufficient time to experience the full benefits of service-learning. The resentment toward service that can result may negatively influence relationships with community partners and may curb students' future civic engagement. Challenges also include the limited resources available to community partners when they are asked to supervise or otherwise invest time and energy in students.

The case studies are informative and helpful; however, readers might benefit from a more detailed description and discussion of the techniques and methods developed to measure the impacts of service-learning on students and communities. For the most part, the authors omit these details and favor a more general discussion of impacts as reported by students and perceived by the scholars themselves. Although this information is certainly interesting, and perhaps accurate, it leaves doubts about the reliability and validity of the impact measures. Still, the impacts reported here can help readers develop measures of service-learning impacts, and lead to development of reliable instrumentation and methodology for future impact evaluations.

About the Reviewer

Loretta Singletary, is a Professor and Extension Educator for the University of Nevada Cooperative Extension. She conducts extension research and education programs emphasizing citizen-based approaches to public issues. She is also interested in methods to evaluate the impacts of collaborative processes as well as venues for reporting impacts to the public. Singletary earned her B.A., M.S., and M.Ed. from the University of South Carolina, and her Ph.D. from Clemson University.