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Scholarship: The Key to Creating Change through Outreach

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Abstract

Outreach can and should exemplify the characteristics typical of any scholarly work if it is to create change in our communities and universities. Glassick, Huber, and Maeroff's insight on the standards for scholarly work are reflected in the processes commonly used to implement outreach. Boyer challenges us to think of scholarship as a communal process. The uniqueness of outreach is that as an activity, it is a communal process. By rooting outreach in scholarship, its quality is enhanced and the work within the academy is enriched. The authors draw from the work of leading authors, their experiences in leading outreach initiatives, their role in planning the Outreach Scholarship 2002 conference, and the articles featured in this journal to share insights on outreach as scholarship.

As universities have become committed to renewing and coordinating their outreach and engagement missions, local, regional, and national conferences have developed and expanded to help members of the academy enrich their efforts. But few of these conferences focus simultaneously on the scholarship of engaging our teaching, research, and service with communities, while involving the broad scope of higher education disciplines, professions, and community partners.

Although all of these outreach and engagement conferences are important and invaluable in extending the scholarship of outreach, the Outreach Scholarship conferences sponsored by the Ohio State University, the Pennsylvania State University and University of Wisconsin—Extension were initiated to play a unique role. They provide a forum for all college faculty and staff, community members, and students, to dialogue about and reflect on their outreach work, to highlight the best practices related to outreach, and to share knowledge related to the process of scholarly outreach.

The theme of the 2002 conference, Outreach Scholarship: Catalyst for Change, reflects the process used to engage universities

with communities. The scholarly process used to develop and implement outreach should be similar to any scholarly work of the academy and can result in change in the community and university. Just as residential teaching, research, and service benefit from the scholarly process, outreach and the impact the universities and their community partners have on society benefit from the scholarly process.

Broadening the Traditional Meaning of Scholarship

As our society and its needs have changed, so has the role of higher education. Many of today's faculty and staff have spent much of their careers in institutions that are a product of the post-World War II era in which research was a key priority. As a result, some may perceive research as synonymous with scholarship. For others, scholarship is much broader.

Academic leaders like Ernest Boyer and Ernest Lynton have expanded our thinking and opened the academy to a broader definition of legitimate academic work—the scholarship of discovery, teaching, integration, and application. The work that we bring special attention to—referred to variously as professional service, application, outreach, or engagement—can be accepted as good scholarship, as long as it meets rigorous standards for scholarly work. Beyond the new paradigm of Boyer's four dimensions of scholarly activity, standards such as Glassick, Huber, and Macroff's *(1997)* for evaluating the adequacy of that work are required.

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Boyer *(1990)* challenged us by stating that "the work of the scholar also means stepping back from one's investigations, looking for connections, building bridges between theory and practice, and communicating one's knowledge effectively to students." *(p.16)* For Boyer, and many in today's academic community, to be a scholar is to integrate our work (teaching, research, and service), engage with those outside the academy, and synthesize what we learn into our other works.

As he stated over eight years ago, "just one hundred years ago the words 'reality' and 'practicality' and 'serviceability' were used

by America's most distinguished academic leaders to describe the central mission of higher education in this country. To put it simply, the scholarship of teaching had been joined by the scholarship of building"*(1997, 70).*

For today's higher education faculty and staff, it is exciting that scholarly work can encompass research, Boyer's broader view of legitimate scholarly work, and his description of engagement in the late 1800s. There is no argument that research is essential to addressing societal needs. One just has to look at the research needs of communities that are wrestling with changing to a technological economy, dealing with health concerns of citizens of all ages, or worrying about threats to public safety. By combining higher education's research and teaching expertise with community engagement, faculty and staff in today's higher education institutions are embarking on their vision of scholarly work. When aspects of teaching, research, and service connect with communities outside the academic community, faculty and staff have succeeded in bringing "reality," "practicality," and "serviceability" to the academic community.

Outreach as a Scholarly Process

Charles Glassick's *(2001)* plenary session at the 2001 Outreach Scholarship conference shared a foundation for thinking of outreach as scholarship. Rather than equating scholarship with a type of academy activity, he broadened the concept to equate scholarship with the characteristics typical of scholarly work. He and Huber and Maeroff found that "when people praise a work of scholarship, they usually mean that the project in question shows that it has been guided by these qualitative standards: clear goals, adequate preparation, appropriate methods, significant results, effective communication and reflective critique" *(1997, 25).*

For individuals engaging universities and communities, these standards also describe the processes of developing and implementing outreach programs. Clear goals are essential for any university-community partnership involving a diverse group of members representing organizations with different missions and objectives. Without adequate knowledge of the discipline, a depth of experience, and the necessary resources to implement the project, the outreach faculty cannot expect a project of the highest quality. For outreach to be successful, the faculty member must understand and use methods appropriate for the specific outreach goals. With these steps in

place, the scholar is then able to measure and assess the impact of the outreach project.

Effective communication and reflective critique are essential in moving outreach to a level at which the academy can have a broader impact upon society. Like any type of scholarship, outreach must be shared with those who can learn from the experience and who can provide feedback and insight that can advance specific outreach programs and in turn the process of outreach.

Other Boyer contemporaries have also built on his foundation by identifying the characteristics of scholarly activity, regardless of the form it takes. Diamond and Adam *(1993)* set out six basic features of scholarly and professional work: the activity requires a high level of discipline-related expertise; it breaks new ground; it can be replicated or elaborated; the work and its results can be documented; they can be peer reviewed; and the activity has significance or impact. Hutchins and Shulman *(1999)* suggest that in order for the work to be scholarly it must be public, be in a form that others can build on, and be open to critique and evaluation.

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It is essential to link these broad definitions and apply the rigorous standards of assessment to all forms of scholarship. The work of the academy can be recognized as legitimate only when it is evaluated by standards that acknowledge its contributions as scholarly acts. Outreach scholarship can and should be held to this standard.

Outreach Scholarship as a Community Process

Not only must outreach scholarship be held to methodological standards of the academy, its products must have an effect, must be communicated. According to Ernest Boyer *(1997)*, "Scholarship, we say, is a communal act. You never get tenured for research alone. You get tenured for research and publication, which means you have to teach somebody what you've learned. And academics must continue to communicate, not only with their peers, but also with future scholars in the classroom in order to keep the flame of scholarship alive" *(p. 88)*. As in Boyer's definition of scholarship, outreach is a communal act. But its uniqueness is that as an activity,

outreach is also a communal process. It extends beyond the walls of the university, and therefore becomes an open process involving community members in all steps of development and implementation. A quality outreach/engagement project cannot be developed without involving community partners or colleagues in related disciplines.

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Outreach scholars are challenged to take the next step to expand the communication and critique of our work to include this broader range of peers. If we do not reflect on what we have learned, or if we do not effectively communicate with others what we have learned through our outreach or the process we used to become engaged, our impact in the community, university, or discipline will wither and die.

Community partners and academy peers can learn from the outreach project and process used. They can provide insightful feedback that can enhance future work. Longenecker's article, "Sustaining Engagement and Rural Scholarship" in this journal demonstrates the valuable insight both community partners and academy peers can bring to an outreach partnership.

Insight concerning the scholarly process can come from academic peers involved with a similar or different discipline. Although the discipline and expertise may vary, the knowledge and insight into the process of outreach scholarship remains consistent across disciplines, and provides a time for reflection and critique of that work. Through this process, we can learn and develop the skills necessary to build upon the scholarship of engagement.

The Outreach Scholarship conference each autumn, the online learning community (at http://www.outreachscholarship.org) and the *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement* provide opportunities to engage in effective communication and reflective critique that is the cornerstone of scholarly outreach. It is this process that enriches the quality of our outreach, allows us to learn from each other through peer critique, and gives us the opportunity to share what we have learned with others, in the academy and in the community. It is through this reflection and sharing that outreach has the maximum impact on communities, the university, and our disciplines.

This issue of the journal is filled with articles that not only reflect on the lessons learned by the authors but also can help us critique and reflect on our outreach efforts at both institutional and individual levels. The articles by Reilly; Jackson and Thomas; and Kriesky and Cote challenge us to think about the role of the traditional extension program in the newly engaged university. The impact of engaging with the community on our individual perceptions is reflected in the articles "Experiencing Engagement: Stories from the Field" by Fear and colleagues and "The Craft of Public Scholarship in Land-Grant Education" by Peters. This collection includes articles related to outreach efforts in disciplines ranging from medicine to natural resources. Yet the knowledge developed through the process of outreach can benefit faculty across many different disciplines.

Scholarly Outreach and Its Impact on the Academy

It is through peer review, whether at conferences such as Outreach Scholarship or publication in this journal, that the dialogue can take place. By incorporating what we have learned into other work, we are generating new ideas and concepts. Therefore, the theme of Outreach Scholarship 2002, "Catalyst for Change," focused not just on the change created in the community through outreach but on the reciprocal impact that this kind of work creates within our institutions.

Outreach must be an intricate partnership between higher education and the community. Through outreach, the research, teaching, and service for which universities are known are brought to bear on societal issues. But if that is the end in itself, we have lost the true value of outreach and the unique role that we as a university bring to local community issues. In fact, if we focus our efforts on reaching out and ignore assessing the scholarship of this work or incorporating what we have learned into our other teaching, research, and service, how do we differentiate higher education outreach from the community engagement or community service of any other institution in our society? Without integrating these results into our on-campus work, we do not reap the total benefits outreach can have on our students, our research, and the university as a whole.

For outreach to have the largest impact, the partnership between the university and community must be reciprocal. Outreach is not an end product. It is a part of a circular process by which what is learned is then incorporated into the other aspects of our

work, work that subsequently impacts our engagement with the community. As Judith Ramaley stated in her conference keynote, which is included in this publication, "In sum, engagement is reciprocal, requires the creation of a shared agenda, and must be mutually beneficial to all participants. It should, in short, generate something of real value in supporting community development along with the enrichment of the student experience and the deepening of the scholarly interest of both faculty and students in the problems presented by the community experience."

One of these "real values" for universities as institutions of teaching and learning is the impact that outreach can have on the learning of graduate and undergraduate students on campus. By involving students in the community through service-learning, clinical work, or internships, the community can receive immediate benefits from their work. Students, however, benefit from a richer learning experience where they can question, interpret, and apply the content they are learning in their courses. Developing new teaching methods, helping students reflect their experiences, and creating an integrated learning environment for students also challenges the faculty member.

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Additionally, teaching credit and noncredit classes in the community can provide a rich learning experience for students and teachers. The daily experiences and students' knowledge challenge faculty members to reflect on the application of the subject matter. The information that can be gathered through community-based teaching, then, can raise questions to inform our future research and teaching on campus.

For communities, which have an abundance of opportunities that are challenging and thought-provoking, the "real value" of engagement appears in discovery through applied and action research. This research, when conducted in partnership with the community, adds to the knowledge base of our disciplines, while at the same time providing the community with valuable research-based information that can help formulate policy decisions that have long-term impact on citizens. The research helps those within the academy advance the discipline's knowledge base, provides insight for future research, and can support our teaching in the classroom.

Viewed in the above-described ways, outreach is not equivalent to the service component of the academic trilogy. Faculty service is outreach when we provide service related to our expertise to committees or organizations in the community. Like teaching and research, this type of service should help us learn and reflect upon our discipline. It should benefit the work inside the campus walls.

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As generators of new ideas within our society, is it not imperative that faculty define their role to include learning from outreach and discovering new methods and means of enhancing society? Is it not also imperative that outreach provide the academic community with new knowledge that advances our understanding of our discipline? It is through outreach scholarship that we are challenged to build the quality and creativity of our work. It is through integration of what we learn through outreach that other components of the academy are strengthened. It is through sharing our work through scholarly activities that others learn and enhance their efforts, while expanding the impact they and we have on society.

Conclusion

Our three institutions, the Ohio State University, the Pennsylvania State University and University of Wisconsin—Extension, in partnership with the University of Georgia, are pleased to make this special edition of the *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement* available, featuring articles that exemplify the scholarship of outreach. We are sure that you will find insightful and thought-provoking reflection on successful outreach efforts and on the process of engaging universities and communities. It is the challenge for all of us to hold outreach to the highest standard of scholarship, not for the benefit of the academy, but for the impact this work can have in communities. By sharing our experiences, critiquing our work, and reflecting on our experiences, we can engage in truly meaningful work that is a "Catalyst for Change" in our communities, our institutions, and ourselves.

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About the Authors

The authors served on the planning committee for the Outreach Scholarship 2002: Catalyst for Change conference. Each member is actively involved at his or her university in leading and implementing university/community partnerships through cooperative extension, continuing education, academic departments, and/or academic support units. They actively work with community partners, resident teaching and research faculty, and students. While giving leadership to the development of the Outreach Scholarship 2002 conference the authors engaged in much discussion and reflection on the role of scholarship not only as a part of the conference program, but also as it impacted their daily outreach and engagement work.