# Conceptualization of the Scholarship of Engagement in Higher Education: A Ten-Year Retrospective

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**Abstract:** During the past decade the generalized concept of the scholarship of engagement has evolved: once a broad call for higher education to be more responsive to communities, it is now a multifaceted field of responses. Engaged scholarship now has its own distinctive architecture, building on yet differing from traditional scholarship.

## The Beginning of a Movement

*"… the academy must become a more vigorous partner in the search for answers to our most pressing social, civic, economic and moral problems, and must reaffirm its historic commitment to what I call the scholarship of engagement"* (Ernest Boyer, 1996, p. 11).

Embracing Ernest Boyer's challenge for higher education to "reaffirm its historic commitment to … the scholarship of engagement" has, over the past decade, led to broader conceptualizations of scholarship itself and thus a stronger integration of faculty research and student learning into the life of communities outside the academy. Educators who define their work within the scholarship of engagement movement tend to draw from service-learning pedagogy, community-based participatory research, and public scholarship as a set of powerful strategies for collaboratively generating knowledge and practices to alleviate social problems affecting communities (Bringle, Games, & Malloy, 1999). Within this national movement, the rubric "scholarship of engagement" references a variety of activities. However, confusion has resulted from the widespread use of this term.

## Purpose and Literature Being Analyzed

Therefore, this paper will (a) review the conceptual development of the scholarship of engagement and thereby (b) contribute to the conceptual clarification of this term. The body of literature reviewed and analyzed for this purpose is the *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement* (originally the *Journal of Public Service and Outreach*, first issued in spring 1996). This interdisciplinary, refereed journal was established with the goal of "enhancing the contributions of outreach to a rapidly changing society" and "fostering collaboration among members of scholarly and professional communities and the diverse public they serve."

## Evolution of the Scholarship of Engagement

Over the 10-year lifespan of the *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*, the concept of "scholarship of engagement" has evolved, becoming differentiated into a multifaceted field. Findings are presented as punctuations in an application of punctuated-equilibrium theory. This theory, borrowed from evolutionary biology where it was used to explain the existence of sudden interruptions—or punctuation—in otherwise continuous fossil records, was advanced by Baumgartner and Jones (1991, 1993) as an explanation for policy formation capable of incorporating elements of both constancy and change. McLendon (2003)

suggests its application to higher education as an analytical framework with which to track changes in the policy agenda status of issues.

*Punctuation: Engagement Defined*

Many authors of the early works were organizational leaders substantiating the need for higher education's engagement with the communities of which they are a part and that fund them (Magrath, 1999; Ramaley, 1997; Votruba, 1996, among others). Further, work defining the characteristics of engagement dominated the literature as authors sought to equate it with or differentiate it from public service and outreach, the third mission of higher education. In 1998-2000 authors argued for expanding the traditional concept of service and outreach to embrace engagement, which emphasized bidirectional interactions, reciprocity, and mutual respect (Byrne, 1998; Leviton, 1999; Ray, 1999; Simpson, 2000). Roper and Hirth's (2005) history of the third mission of higher education evaluated Boyer's (1996) conception of engagement as "a new twist for higher education: the two-way street of interactions or partnerships between the academy and the outside world" (p. 12).

Spanier (1997) too emphasized reciprocal relationships between universities and communities: "in the integrated model of the university's missions, outreach … is a partnership through which the university opens itself up to society" (p. 8). He was among the first to articulate the value of integrating the teaching, research, and public service missions: "… it is through their synergies that we will create and support the broad-based and active learning community that is best prepared to cope with society's challenges" (p. 8).

In sum, the first punctuation in the conceptualization of the scholarship of engagement involved defining its underlying values and principles of bidirectional reciprocity expressed through campus-community partnerships. This two-way dimension differentiates engagement from outreach, which extends university resources to the community.

*Punctuation: Engagement as Teaching and Research*

The next punctuation in conceptualizing the scholarship of engagement involved uncoupling engagement (conceptually if not linguistically) from service, public service, or outreach in its many forms: cooperative extension, technology transfer, economic development, continuing education, extended education, even adult education. Articles reflected the emergent understanding that engaged partnerships could be manifested through instruction (with service learning as an instructional pedagogy) and through some types of research (applied research, participatory action research, community-based research). A majority of articles in the 2000s described service-learning and university-community partnership cases and identified benefits for both students and communities (Guerra, 2005; Lynch, Zovinka, Zhang, Hruska, & Lee, 2005). Generally they lack the element of generating knowledge with public participation (Beckman & Caponigro, 2005; Daynes, Howell, & Lindsay, 2003). Simpson (2000) was among those who drew from Boyer's *Scholarship Reconsidered* (1990) the conclusion that the relevance of application for scholarship has been underappreciated: "Sometimes the very act of application leads to new insights, methods, policies, theories and practices that contribute directly to the scholarship of discovery and integration" (p. 9).

Zlotkowski (1997) champions service learning as a vehicle for academic renewal in universities, but does not address its reciprocal or scholarly dimensions. He observes that service learning "provides a way of grappling successfully with many of the dysfunctions referenced in

critiques of the contemporary academy" and "of organizing and coordinating some of the most exciting recent developments in pedagogical practices" (p.81).

> Couto (2000) regards the scholarship of engagement as another name for participatory action research (PAR). The author argued that PAR moves service learning to the core of the universities' teaching, research, and service. He projects that PAR is "the form of service learning with the greatest possibility for integration in the classroom and the curriculum" (p. 10). Johnston (2000) introduced yet another term—Academically Based Community Service (ABCS)—to describe his engagement activity, which is an undergraduate course involving participatory action research.

*Punctuation: Engagement as a Scholarly Expression*

Analysis of the literature shows that over time two tracks of theory and practice have evolved: institutional civic engagement and the scholarship of engagement. By 2001 the unique characteristics of engagement as scholarship were emerging and the scholarship of engagement was differentiating itself within the general umbrella of engagement. Driscoll and Sandmann (2001) connect the scholarship of engagement and notions of scholarship.

> The scholarship of engagement continues to … 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.… (p. 11)

Such campuswide initiatives have defined the scholarship of engagement within the institutional context at several universities (Bruns et al., 2003; Lunsford, Church, & Zimmerman, 2006; Wise, Retzleff, & Reilly, 2002). Notable is the UniSCOPE model from Pennsylvania State University, which recognizes outreach as "a concept that describes a wide range of scholarly activities that involve mainly the integration, education, and application functions of scholarship" and thus "an integral part of the scholarship of teaching, research, and service" (Hyman et al., 2001-2002, p. 60).

More work was being done on the two grounding principles of the scholarship of engagement: mutually beneficial, reciprocal partnerships and integration of teaching, research, and service. For example, Weerts (2005) applied Havelock's theory of knowledge flow to community-university relationships to value reciprocity and engagement. Added to this was understanding of engagement as a scholarly process. By using Glassick, Huber, and Maeroff (1997), Simpson (2000) and Bruns et al. (2003) discuss the qualitative standards of scholarship that also apply to the scholarship of engagement: clear goals, adequate preparation, appropriate methods, significant results, effective communication, and reflective critique.

Fear, Rosaen, Foster-Fishman, and Bawden (2001) made a major contribution as reflective scholar-practitioners when they put scholarship rather than outreach or engagement at the center:

> We purposely choose to refer to scholarly work in outreach in terms of outreach *as scholarly expression* rather than *as the scholarship of outreach*. The *scholarship of outreach* conveys separateness—of outreach. *Outreach as scholarly expression* suggests a connection to something larger—to scholarship. (p. 24; emphasis in original)

The authors argued that outreach as scholarly expression means understanding what really happens when scholars work collaboratively with community members. They can thus identify and focus on contextual factors influencing the way or the reason of outreach innovation failure. By 2004, Barker's review brought conceptual clarity by indicating that the scholarship of engagement is understood to consist of "(1) research, teaching, integration, and application

scholarship that (2) incorporate reciprocal practices of civic engagement into the production of knowledge" (p. 124). To differentiate this particular type of scholarship from the overall engagement movement, terms such as engaged scholarship, scholarly engagement, community engaged scholarship, and public scholarship are being applied to work that adheres to both the standards of quality scholarship and the tenets and values of engagement (Bartel, Krasny, & Harrison, 2003; Bridger & Alter, 2006; Bruns et al., 2003; Lunsford, Church, & Zimmerman, 2006). To this discussion can be added the relationship of the scholarship of engagement to Boyer's thinking about the scholarship of integration and, more commonly, the scholarship of application (Astroth, 2004). So, although there are multifaceted practices, engaged scholarship (as engagement as scholarship has come to be called) has evolved as a distinct dimension of the engagement movement and is evolving a distinctive scholarly expression and architecture, building on yet differing from traditional scholarship.

*Punctuation: Scholarly Engagement Institutionalized*

The literature addresses another punctuation: institutionalization of the scholarship of engagement within academe. A few articles ask how the scholarship of engagement can be actualized while facing institutional cultures that emphasize traditional scholarship (Dana & Emihovich, 2004; Fear & Sandmann, 2001-2002; Wise, Retzleff, & Reilly, 2002). Lunsford, Church, and Zimmerman (2006) present Michigan State University as having developed an institutional framework that identifies and supports engagement as a scholarly function. Adamek et al. (2004) revisit the authorship and publication of the Penn State UniSCOPE 2000 document to show how investment and energy at the individual and institutional level have created a culture of engagement on college campuses. The most common postscript for institutionalizing the scholarship of engagement is represented by Bartel, Krasny, and Harrison's (2003) observation that "Universities can systematically address the demands for more social engagement only by exploring new reward and administrative structures" (p. 89).

## From Retrospective to Prospective

This review is only an initial analysis of the conceptual development of the scholarship of engagement. The themes presented here need verification within a broadened and extended review. Similar analysis is possible for works published during the past decade in the *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning,* a national peer-reviewed academic journal covering research, theory, pedagogy, and issues pertinent to the service-learning community. Another promising body of research comprises books in which authors of seminal articles in the *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement* have further developed their perspectives.

Punctuated-equilibrium theory, by explaining complex institutional dynamics, particularly those highly disaggregated in nature like higher education, could also point to the next possible developments in the conceptualization of the scholarship of engagement. According to McLendon (2003), macropolitical institutions begin to become involved as more local institutions "grapple with [the issue] and with each other in an effort to resolve the new 'hot' issue" (True, Jones, & Baumgartner, 1990, p. 10). Looking to international, disciplinary, and transdisciplinary perspectives on engaged scholarship may thus also prove fruitful.

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