



From the Guest Editors

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As members of the broader community call for and develop new ways to participate in civic arenas, we also see a parallel response in community engagement activity and community-engaged scholarship to support new types of public interaction. Community engagement activity and community-engaged scholarship are beginning to create opportunities to generate, mobilize, and evaluate knowledge in ways that align with emerging modes of public participation. An excerpt from Tina Nabatchi and Matt Leighninger's (2015) new book entitled "Public Participation for 21st Century Democracy" effectively captures how access, ability, and interest to generate and mobilize new knowledge are setting the conditions for new types of public participation:

The greatest element of our improved problem-solving capacity lies in citizens themselves. We enjoy higher levels of education and communication, and we are more committed than ever to the notion that all people deserve certain inalienable rights. Our ability to understand, use, and improve technology is growing by leaps and bounds: everyone, it seems, is a potential scientist, analyst, or inventor. The power of ordinary people, and the ability of government, civil society, and other institutions to unleash that capacity, is key to our progress as a civilization. (p. 3)

This excerpt points to emergent civic activity and how evolving civic infrastructure is changing the way people participate in public life. Furthermore, the excerpt reflects a sense that traditional hierarchies of knowledge creation, dissemination, and application have been disrupted. The implied disruption to common understanding of knowledge and public participation is significant to community-engaged scholarship, community-campus partnerships, and more general forms of collaboration. Progress is now commonly linked to how people organize structures of public participation and community engagement. As a result, emergent notions of public participation are increasingly reshaping the way communities and universities and colleges are generating, mobilizing, and evaluating new knowledge.

New forms of participation in civic life offer implications for how knowledge is generated and put to use, in deliberation and participatory paradigms, as well as how these processes can support broader participation in public life.

In the spring of 2014, *Partnerships: A Journal of Service-Learning and Community Engagement* released a call for papers that asked authors to explore the implications of new public

participation practices associated with community-engaged scholarship activity and community-campus partnerships. We were very pleased by the level of interest we received in the initial call. The articles in this special issue illustrate emergent forms of community engagement activity. Authors highlighted and pointed to examples of how communities are designing civic engagement strategies, creating structures that support full community participation, and described new forms of deliberation and community building that more closely align with wider levels of inclusion.

The notion of full participation in the past has provided a framework to consider how higher education "...institutions are rooted in and accountable to multiple communities, both those who live, work, and matriculate within higher education and those who physically and practically occupy physical or project spaces connected to higher education institutions" (Strum, Eatman, Saltmarsh, & Bush, 2011, p. 4). The articles included in this special issue provide evidence of a transition in how people are understanding and attempting to practice the idea of full participation.

There is a growing sense demonstrated by the articles in this special issue that full participation not only carries aspects of accountability, but also includes more complex requirements that attend to how, why, and to what ends people interact. This new form of community engagement activity leads to a general reconsideration of the role higher education has in public participation, values and processes. It was once almost a default assumption that higher education would have a key role in knowledge production, dissemination, and evaluation practices. New forms of public participation have redefined the role higher education has in determining what is considered knowledge and how meaning is attached to knowledge. Academic service-learning and community engagement activity now have a degree of maturity in higher education that allows scholar-practitioners to reconsider, challenge, and rearticulate assumptions that inform such work. This collection of articles does just that by beginning to sketch a path from the accepted to emergent practices of public participation existing within forms of community-engaged scholarship and practice.

Scholar-practitioners are operating in new ways that challenge traditional assumptions of community engagement and are devising strategies to apply principles of the field in new ways. New community engagement practices are creating tensions and opportunities for traditional organizational structures of higher education that are not designed to accommodate emergent community engagement activity. Individuals engaged in new types of partnerships and community engagement activity confront a range of new interesting questions: What is the scope of community participation when devising engaged scholarship? How must monitoring, measuring, and evaluation strategies adjust to accommodate new forms of participation? In what ways must teaching, learning and traditional scholarly methods evolve to support new forms of participation that are focused on making progress on tough challenges in community? How must the peer-review and tenure and promotion processes evolve to account for scholarly artifacts and knowledge that emerged from community-engaged scholarship? What is the scope of free inquiry and academic freedom when

community-engaged scholarship and public participation is not centered on an individual scholar's expertise? How do communities recruit, hire, and retain community engagement scholar-practitioners? Who is responsible for creating the conditions for community members and community engagement scholar-practitioners to cultivate the skills, dispositions, attitudes and understanding of processes necessary to form effective community engagement partnerships?

The articles we received highlight ways in which community engagement practices and associated principles are creating new ways to describe and validate civic and public work. Each of the included articles demonstrates and points to community engagement activity that has powerful explanatory potential, yet does not necessarily fit the mold commonly accepted in higher education circles. These articles illustrate how the focus, practice, and expectations of community engagement are evolving as scholar-practitioners and community members more intentionally embody structures of inclusion, participation, and deliberation. Each of these articles provides a framework or case studies of how community engagement practice is challenging assumptions about who participates, how people participate, the purpose of participation, and why broader participation is deemed important to the formation of values and processes of community engagement.

Institutional structures that once consistently conferred status to those considered worthy of creating and receiving knowledge are being rethought. The transformation this collection represents does not merely illustrate a democratization of knowledge, but signals a shift in how the involvement of more diverse perspectives and patterns of involvement are effectively putting new knowledge to use in interesting ways. The articles in this special issue illuminate a relationship between theory and practice that surfaces a type of knowledge and mode of understanding that is novel in very interesting ways.

Community Engagement as Adaptive Response to Wicked Problems

There is growing evidence to suggest that community engagement is being used as a method and strategy to respond to "wicked" problems in ways that are consistent with adaptive leadership (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linksy, 2009) and systems leadership (Senge, Hamilton, & Kania, 2015). The programs identified in Paula Horrigan's manuscript entitled, "Rust to green: The dialogic space of university-community peacemaking praxis," and Kathryn Yankura's piece entitled, "Towards productive disagreement: Deliberation, democracy processes in community engagement and service-learning," point to specific examples in which the methods of community engagement are being leveraged to create the conditions necessary to respond to uncertainty, complexity, and the messiness often associated with "tough" challenges. The depth of community engagement activity in these examples demonstrates practical ways individuals are using community-engaged scholarship as a leverage point to respond to adaptive challenges associated with the work. The articles included in this special issue point to skills, attitudes, and dispositions that are necessary to effectively design processes that make

progress on tough challenges. Coming to the work from a civic leadership capacity-building perspective raises the question of how to responsibly work with community to promote meaningful civic leadership development. Who is to determine what type of civic leadership education and development is needed to support academic service-learning and community engagement? How should the field evaluate implied capacities or “soft skills” associated with exercising the types of civic leadership necessary to advance community-engaged scholarship activity? These questions have implications for how we interpret the way communities interact to make sense of their lived experience.

Adaptive work associated with civic leadership does not fit neatly within organizational structures or the culture associated with higher education. In Kevin Kecskes article entitled, “Collectivizing our impact: Engaging departments and academic change,” we notice an emergent element in how people are interacting in public spaces and tension with how institutions of higher education are attempting to create space for community engagement activity. Kecskes provides a language to consider the opportunities academic departments occupy in the emerging practice of community engagement.

Are We Seeing Evidence That Points to an Emergent Type of Community Engagement Practice and Activity?

Community-engaged scholarship is taking on a new character that applies knowledge in novel ways to societal issues. This knowledge is creating opportunities for people to interact in ways that gives meaning to values and processes often associated with the practice of democracy. Emergent practices and community engagement activities are increasingly being designed to work across sectors, organizations, and topical areas. The articles included in this volume assume, to varying degrees, that community engagement activity is working through diffused networks of collaboration and iterative patterns of interaction. These new ways of practicing community engagement are increasingly bumping against and are in tension with traditional structures (negotiated faculty workload, academic calendars, and distinction between teaching, research, and service, etc.) and processes (e.g., participation, knowledge creation, and mobilization).

As broader approaches to engagement emerge, so must new ways to use the resources that academic institutions have to support scholarship, student learning, and community engagement. Jennifer Dugan’s article entitled, “Governing academic civic engagement lessons and challenges from four engaged campuses,” points to new ways scholar-practitioners are evaluating approaches to community engagement across institutions. These new models can encourage ways of “doing better with less” while seeking new sources of community and philanthropic support for community engagement.

In addition, the slow shift in scholarly culture that affects the review process for articles describing new approaches to community engagement and knowledge generation can serve

as a brake on the emergence of a broader portfolio of community engagement efforts. To address this latter question, several new journals have been developed in recent years to provide a platform for scholarly contributions based on new approaches to collaboration. Among those journals is *Partnerships*.

In fact, this particular special issue reflects emergent practices that link practice to theory in interesting ways. Each of the articles went through a traditional peer review process. However, editorial and reviewer feedback was processed and made sense of collectively. The authors and editors worked through a co-created process to produce this introduction and make sense of how each of the manuscripts represented portions of the larger ecosystem we hoped to capture.

The articles in this special issue point to larger questions about how new forms of community engagement are applying pressure to traditional structures of knowledge and dissemination. Themes within this special issue raise awareness to the following questions: How does our field disseminate knowledge in ways that are useful to communities? What are the appropriate ways to disseminate new knowledge that can guide and inform community engagement work? How can scholarship production be more closely linked to practice? These questions challenge traditional professional notions of authority (or expertise), authorship, publication, and scholarship. We are witnessing the growth of an emergent community engagement space in which community-engaged scholars are rewarded for producing new knowledge that is evaluated against standards of relevance, usefulness, and more general notions of inclusion and participation. The next phase of community engagement will begin to consider and develop structures that help facilitate and evaluate claims of relevance and broader applicability.

Conclusion

We conclude from our review of the articles submitted for this special issue of *Partnerships* that the practice of community engagement, and the related shifts in approaches to scholarship and the curriculum, will continue to evolve. We are changing our ways of thinking about what it means to be well educated, and revisiting questions about what our graduates should be able to do with what they have learned. Accompanying these changes in the need of society for an educated citizenry, our colleges and universities are welcoming a new generation of academics who have new scholarly interests, a desire to work in a collaborative mode across disciplines, and who are inspired by the experiences and concerns of the broader community as a source for scholarly inquiry.

As both students and faculty embrace different expectations about the value and experience of education, we expect that the practice of community engagement will continue to develop, shaped by changing ways we approach learning and teaching, as well as by emerging societal problems and opportunities that draw us unto more complex collaborations. These new forms of collaboration will be supported by new kinds of institutional and community interactions

and new ways of documenting and evaluating the impact of engaged work. We are entering an exciting era of change and commitment to the public purposes of higher education, and the articles that follow offer insights into what that next phase will mean in practice.

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