



Collaborative Futures: Critical Reflections on Publicly Active Graduate Education.

Amanda Gilvin, Georgia M. Roberts, and Craig Martin (Editors). Syracuse, New York: The Graduate School Press of Syracuse University. 2012. 409 pages.

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I have a confession to make: I am an inveterate cheapskate. Once when my sister was visiting me after I landed my first full-time, post PhD. job, she looked around and said, "You have a nice house, but you still live like a graduate student." I guess it was the futon couch I had her sleeping on in the living room, but I'll admit that I sometimes pinch pennies hard enough to make even Lincoln grin. So when I first thumbed through *Collaborative Futures* and saw that over a third of the essays in the book were reprints – with some, such as Ivan Illich's "To Hell with Good Intentions" or Ernest Boyer's, "The Scholarship of Engagement," widely available on the Internet for free – I wondered how I could recommend that anyone, let alone the engaged graduate students it targets, buy the book. But when I looked up the price on Amazon and found new copies available for less than \$19, shipping included, I had second thoughts.

Collaborative Futures is a rather esoteric collection of essays on the state of publicly engaged scholarship and the career options for graduate students pursuing this scholarship for their dissertations and beyond. Although I have actively engaged in one form of public scholarship or another for almost 30 years now, I found some reprinted works in the collection new and insightful, such as George J Sánchez's chapter, "Crossing Figueroa: The Tangled Web of

Diversity and Democracy," originally delivered as the fifth annual Dewey Lecture at the University of Michigan in 2004, and then published in *Imagining America's Foreseeable Futures* series in 2005. Some of the original works included in the volume were also thoughtful and inspiring, such as Austin Bunn's excellent reflection on what made the Patient Voice Project he initiated at the University of Iowa in 2005 so successful, and how it has since been replicated in many other campuses and communities around the country.

The organizational plan for the book is meant to "foster reflection on the reader's own work" (p. 7), with the first section focusing on historical and contemporary contexts for research on civic engagement and service-learning in the U.S.; the second on "Programs of Action" or descriptions of successful civic engagement programs or initiatives; and the final section comprised of reflections by (former) graduate students on paths they charted through the emerging forest of campus and community partnerships formed across the country in the last two decades. However, this reviewer was more disoriented than enlightened by reading side-by-side speeches, policy documents, descriptive reports, and self-reflections.

I was often both comforted and amused by recalling Kenneth Burke's (1941) famous parlor metaphor for academic discourse since the many of the essays in the collection were inspired by conversations started at past *Imagining America* conferences. Since I have never attended (or heard of) these conferences, I was in the position of Burke's lonely academic, arriving late for the party and a little uncertain what everyone is talking about, but finding the conversation stimulating nonetheless because of the youthful enthusiasm each contributor expresses as he or she works towards "transformative social change right now" (p. 2). But with that youthful enthusiasm comes a bit of foolishness too: A few of the authors spend too much time splitting semantic hairs in defending their favored term for civic engagement while denigrating yesterday's favored term — "service-learning bad; public scholarship good" -- as if changing the name changes the nature of the collaboration between universities and communities. This is as harmful as it is foolish since civic engagement is marginalized in academia to begin with, and thus needs to raise a tent big enough for all who want to join the discussion, regardless of their disciplinary or regional dialect.

Older guides-on-the-side like me are welcomed into the book as mentors for today's aspiring graduate students interested in public scholarship. Several chapters, such as those by Nicholas Behm and Duane Roen; Linda S. Bergmann, Allen Brizee, and Jaclyn M. Wells; and Kristen Day, Victor Becerra, Vicki L. Ruiz, and Michael Powe are co-authored by professor-graduate student teams, demonstrating the enduring attraction of joint publications as a popular form of scholarly mentoring. Day et al.'s analysis of the skills inherent in public scholarship that transfer most readily to other, non-academic job-tracks provided accessible and practical advice for anyone who has to submit performance evaluations or explain their research in utilitarian terms to corporate and political leaders. Recent graduates and current graduate students are also encouraged to demonstrate leadership in mentoring, and so most of the chapters in section three provide a venue for these emerging leaders to share the insights they gleaned from their graduate school experiences.

Is the book “indispensable,” as the cover description suggests? No. Is it worth \$20? Possibly. If you have the time and inclination to be amused, confused, enlightened, and inspired while reading a single collection of texts on civic engagement in the 21st century, then Collaborative Futures may be just the ticket. For the lucky few Syracuse University graduate students who received free copies of the book with their graduate school acceptance letters, the price can’t be beat. And may I suggest that the more enterprising among you consider selling your copy online when you’ve finished reading it, so cheapskates like me can join the party for the price of a pizza.

References

Gilvin , A., Roberts, G. M., & Martin, C. (2012). *Collaborative futures: Critical reflections on publicly active graduate education*. (pp. xxix-409). Syracuse, New York: The Graduate School Press of Syracuse University.

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