Community-Engaged Scholarship in the Academy

AN ACTION AGENDA

By Sherril B. Gelmon, Catherine Jordan and Sarena D. Seifer

Sherril B. Gelmon is professor of public health and chair of the division of public administration at Portland State University. The national evaluator for Community-Campus Partnerships for Health for both the Community-Engaged Scholarship for Health Collaborative and Faculty for the Engaged Campus, she was founding chair of the International Association for Research on Service-Learning and Community Engagement and the 2011 recipient of the Thomas Ehrlich Civically Engaged Faculty Award from Campus Compact. Catherine Jordan directs the University of Minnesota Extension's Children, Youth and Family Consortium. She has worked with Community-Campus Partnerships for Health's FIPSE-funded proj-

ects, the Community-Engaged Scholarship for Health Collaborative, and Faculty for the Engaged Campus. She is the founding editor of CES4Health.info and the recipient of the University of Minnesota's Outstanding Community Service Award. Sarena D. Seifer is founding executive director of Community-Campus Partnerships for Health, where she has led a series of national projects designed to support community-engaged careers in the academy. She was recognized in 1998 as a Cross Future Leader by the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE) and in 2007 with the Tom Bruce Award for Leadership in Community-Based Public Health from the American Public Health Association.

Over the past decade or more, national commissions, professional associations, and accrediting and funding agencies have identified community engagement as a core mission of higher education. Students, faculty, and community partners all benefit from moving the classroom to the community (and back again).

Community-engaged research has also gained recognition as a legitimate approach to producing and mobilizing knowledge. Yet as changes to curricula and research within programs or institutions (and in some cases across disciplines

> "Universities…are increasingly expected to play a leadership role in addressing problems of the larger community by engaging with practitioners outside of the academy.

> **Engagement educates students for democratic citizenship, mobilizes multiple forms of knowledge, and leverages the capacities of all the participants to improve community well-being.**

or clusters of disciplines) have moved forward, there has not been similar progress in reforming definitions of scholarship to include multiple forms of research that engage the community and have a meaningful impact on it.

Universities, the great majority of which are publicly supported to a greater or lesser extent, are increasingly expected to play a leadership role in addressing problems of the larger community by engaging with practitioners outside of the academy. The faculty involved apply their expertise to real-world problems and collaborate with peers in other sectors, who also bring their knowledge and wisdom to the table, in order to generate, disseminate, and apply new knowledge – a practice known as *community-engaged scholarship* (CES).

CES combines the principles of community engagement with accepted standards of scholarship. *Community engagement* entails the application of institutional resources to solve problems facing communities through collaboration with those communities. This engagement educates students for democratic citizenship, mobilizes multiple forms of knowledge, and leverages the capacities of all the participants to improve community well-being.

Community engagement in and of itself is not necessarily scholarship. That term is reserved for research and scholarship that uses a scholarly approach, is grounded in work that has come before, and is documented through products that can be disseminated and subjected to critique by peers from a variety of contexts.

Most universities do not have in place the incentives and supports needed for faculty to work in this way. In particular, systems in place at most universities for faculty recruitment and career advancement have not kept pace with faculty roles in and with communities. Faculty are generally rewarded more for publishing a paper in an academic journal or receiving grant funding than for contributing to meaningful societal change.

Yet some institutions are role models in making the changes that enable this work. In the sections that follow, we consider the challenges faculty, community partners, and institutions face in conducting engaged scholarship and describe opportunities for improvement and promising practices.

FACULTY CAPACITY
The Problems

For faculty, CES presents challenges as well as opportunities. Two primary issues—what is considered a publication and what counts as impact—underlie, directly or indirectly, most of those challenges. A *publication* is traditionally considered to be a manuscript (although books are the gold standard in some fields) published in a peer-reviewed journal. At some institutions, nothing else is taken as seriously in evaluating a faculty member.

Measures of *impact* have historically focused on readership or citations, as represented by the *journal impact score*. This score is a proxy measure for the article's influence within the field: It represents the frequency with which the "average article" in a journal has been cited for two years after publication.

Traditional definitions of scholarship, including rigid interpretations of what counts as a publication and how to define and measure impact, have not served community-engaged scholars well. Academic journals are often not interested in publishing manuscripts about community-engaged activities.

In any case, while scholarly journals are critical for communicating with academic audiences, they are poor vehicles for communicating with practitioners, policymakers, community leaders, and the public. Effective CES demands that the scholar produce diverse forms of scholarship in innovative formats—such as documentaries, websites, briefs, or manuals—for non-academic audiences and uses. But work presented in those formats may not be recognized as serious scholarship by academic peers.

The work of community-engaged scholars can be undervalued in a number of other ways as well. Sometimes other faculty, academic administrators, and committee members or external reviewers in the promotion and tenure processes assume that the rigor of community-engaged work suffers as a result of what are considered best practices in community engagement, such as shared decision-making. Sometimes community-engaged scholars are questioned about the amount of time they spend in the community during partnership formation, which can require a lengthy process of building relationships and trust.

Community-engaged scholars are often advised to place their "community work" in the less-valued "service" section of their *curriculum vitae* or promotion and tenure dossiers.

Historically, faculty and institutional leaders have considered any work in the community as service simply because of its venue, rather than looking at what might qualify it to be viewed as scholarship.

The late Ernest Boyer, who challenged higher education to adopt a broader notion of scholarship in his landmark work *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate* and subsequent writings, provided a framework for expanding the domains of scholarship to incorporate teaching, discovery, integration, application, and engagement. Further work by Charles Glassick, Mary Taylor Huber, and Gene Maeroff (*Scholarship Assessed: Evaluation of the Professoriate*) provided a strategy for evaluating these forms of scholarship.

Another complication for faculty members doing CES is that the issues addressed through community engagement are complex and not always amenable to discipline-specific approaches. Although community-engaged scholars may clearly see the connection between their disciplinary expertise and the community issue(s) they are addressing, their colleagues may see a disconnect between the two.

Community-engaged scholars can sometimes be their own worst enemies. First, given the time and effort required to conduct high-quality community-engaged work, waiting until the end of a project to produce scholarship or limiting it to a report of research findings results in the appearance of low scholarly productivity. It also reflects the scholars' lack of understanding, or perhaps fear of others' lack of understanding, of the range of possible formats in which to present those findings.

Second, engagement ideally enhances the quality of both research and teaching. Failure to recognize this connection, and to frame it this way for peers and reviewers, can result in community-engaged work being considered an "add-on," which makes it easily marginalized or eliminated from

> **"While scholarly journals are critical for communicating with academic audiences, they are poor vehicles for communicating with practitioners, policymakers, community leaders, and the public.**

consideration altogether in evaluating either teaching or research.

Third, faculty may assume that service learning is by definition engaged scholarship, but it is not. Such an approach to teaching and learning may lead to research, but the act of working with the community is not scholarship unless it results in products that are disseminated and subjected to critique by peers. Yet faculty sometimes present this kind of teaching as scholarship in and of itself and become frustrated that they are not being rewarded for it.

The policies governing the promotion and tenure processes pose challenges to the community-engaged scholar. Criteria for promotion and/or tenure are often silent on the definitions of *scholarly publication* and *impact* or define those terms in ways that exclude some products created by community-engaged scholars and their partners that have important public effects.

In addition, promotion or tenure review is an evaluation of an individual. But community-engaged work is conducted in partnerships, and responsibility and credit for that work are meant to be shared. The need to disentangle and claim credit for individual contributions while respecting the substantive role of community partners often proves challenging.

Finally, community partners are rarely given recognition as co-investigators, since they are not tenured or core faculty. Faculty need to be able to draw upon their expert community partners' insights and experiences and engage them as valued collaborators. The resistance to including community partners as collaborators also sets up a power differential that may undermine the intent of the collaboration.

Opportunities and Promising Practices

The challenges discussed above also present opportunities, which in some cases have led to innovative practices that have the potential both to enhance the impact scholars can have through their community-engaged work and to improve their career success and satisfaction.

Publication outlets. As community-engaged research and teaching gain momentum, it is increasingly important that mechanisms be available for the dissemination of both traditional and innovative products of CES. Print and online journals and other outlets focused on community engagement and CES are becoming increasingly available and recognized as legitimate.

For example, Johns Hopkins University Press's journal *Progress in Community Health Partnerships* (*PCHP*) publishes scholarship produced by community-based partnerships. A Medline-indexed print and online journal, *PCHP* is innovative in the range of manuscript formats it solicits and the range of academic and community experts it uses as peer

reviewers. Research articles are typically accompanied by a "community perspectives" article authored by community partners. The journal also publishes reports of work in progress and lessons learned, as well as descriptions of applied products.

Repositories containing peer-reviewed products of CES are a relatively new development. One such repository for the peer review and online publication of CES products in forms other than journal manuscripts is *CES4Health* (www.ces4health.info), which relies on academic and community peer reviewers, each provided with one hour of training in reviewing a non-traditional CES product.

Since its launch in 2009, *CES4Health* has published over 50 such products, including educational videos, digitized stories, policy reports, and training curricula. Individuals who download published products provide their email addresses, which enable users to be surveyed periodically about their perceptions of product quality and impact. This information can be invaluable to faculty authors preparing for promotion or tenure.

Informed colleagues. We need colleagues, mentors, administrators, and external reviewers who understand and value CES—individuals who appreciate the rigor required to conduct CES, the investment of time and effort required for partnership building, and the double duty that community-engaged scholars perform to meet the expectations of their disciplines and of best practices in community engagement and CES.

Community-Campus Partnerships for Health's Online Database of Faculty Mentors and Portfolio Reviewers (www.facultydatabase.info), another resource, is a searchable database of community-engaged scholars who are willing to mentor novices and serve as external reviewers in the promotion and tenure review processes.

Faculty development. To prepare faculty, Blanchard et al. (2009) proposed a developmental progression of CES competencies, from those necessary for all faculty to those that are important for advanced scholars. They also provide a list of development activities for faculty at various levels of CES expertise. The object is to help those designing faculty development experiences to create offerings for various contexts, including the individual faculty, school, university, and disciplinary organization levels.

Institutional change. An institution's promotion or tenure guidelines are one of the strongest expressions of its priorities and values. Since the review processes begin at the level of the department at most institutions, the department can change those reviews in ways that transform the institutional culture.

Campus Compact initiated the Engaged Department Institutes and developed the associated *Engaged Department Toolkit* to help academic departments incorporate community engagement and related teaching strategies such as service learning into their disciplinary and departmental culture and activities. Departments often take their cues from trends within their disciplines. Imagining America's Tenure Team Initiative (Artists and Scholars in Public Life), for example, provides guidance for the arts and humanities. CCPH's *Promotion and Tenure Package* (available at www.ccph.info) is designed to assist promotion and tenure committees to institute policies and practices that support CES.

COMMUNITY CAPACITY
The Problems

In CES, community and academic partners are peers and co-producers of knowledge. But the great majority of resources that support this scholarship go to faculty, with community partners often serving in un- or under-compensated roles. If we are to achieve the equitable partnerships that CES demands, we need to invest in those partners.

Many barriers exist to achieving equity in the relationships that underlie this kind of scholarship. Institutional policies and procedures are rarely established with regard to the roles, responsibilities, needs, or assets of community-based partners. In classes with a community-based component, for example, the academic instructor typically develops syllabi, assignments, and evaluations unilaterally.

In research, the Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) that assess the ethics of proposed studies focus primarily on the risks and benefits to individual participants and not to the communities involved. Universities may charge high indirect-cost recovery rates on grants for research projects that largely take place off-campus, and community organizations often assume significant upfront costs before being reimbursed. Successful CES requires modifying institutional requirements in order to value and respect community partners.

> "An institution's promotion or tenure guidelines are one of the strongest expressions of its priorities and values.

> **"CBOs are holding universities accountable for equitable partnerships through memoranda of understanding that describe the principles governing the partnerships and a plan for how these will be monitored and evaluated.**

Funding agencies often erect other barriers in their funding announcement specifications and the manner in which proposals are reviewed. For example, a recent National Institutes of Health funding opportunity intended to support research infrastructure in communities prohibited community organizations from being the lead applicants. Review panels comprised primarily of academics who have not done this kind of work are unlikely to raise critical questions about the authenticity of a partnership, the compensation of community partners, and the distribution of funds.

Opportunities and Promising Practices

As they become savvy about their relationships with academic institutions and increasingly aware of their value and power, community leaders and community-based organizations (CBOs) are organizing to make change. The recently formed Community Network for Research Equity and Impact, for example, has coalesced around an agenda for action, based on the premise that for research to have impact in communities, members of those communities must have the capacity and infrastructure to perform as research partners with faculty and to conduct their own research. The National Community Committee of the Prevention Research Centers brings the voices of CBOs from across the country together to inform decision-making at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

On a local level, CBOs are holding universities accountable for equitable partnerships through memoranda of understanding that describe the principles governing the partnerships and a plan for how these will be monitored and evaluated. Some tribes, CBOs, and community coalitions have established research ethics review boards that operate in parallel or partnership with university IRBs to ensure that the risks and benefits of community-based research are fully considered.

Some universities and faculty are implementing exciting new approaches to supporting their community partners. The Community Faculty Program at Charles Drew University in Los Angeles, for example, confers paid faculty appointments on local leaders who are research collaborators and who bridge the divide between academic researchers and community members.

The community expert position at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill enlists community partners to provide compensated technical assistance to community-academic partnerships. Meanwhile, the Detroit Community-Academic Urban Research Center at the University of Michigan has adopted procedures for dissemination-related activities in which at least one university and one Detroit partner co-present at meetings and co-author publications.

A graduate-level course in community-based participatory research offered at the University of Minnesota is open to community members, who may register for the course either for graduate credit or to earn a certificate of participation.

INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY
The Problems

Much of the resistance to CES is grounded in the culture and traditions of the academy, home of an intellectual elite who are separate from the community by virtue of their advanced education. This *town* vs. *gown* split is such that in some disciplines and institutions, faculty may not know where to find a "real" community-based organization or understand how a collaboration might be beneficial to their scholarship, their students, and their institution. On many campuses, there is no visionary leadership to counter the often guild-like mentality of the academic disciplines.

Education institutions are complex bureaucracies, which are notoriously slow to change. Among the institutional structures, philosophies, and operating practices that create barriers for CES, probably the most problematic are the non-supportive criteria for the evaluation of faculty performance and related procedures for personnel review that enable an individual to advance through the academic ranks (whether on a tenure, clinical, or other academic professional track).

This reflects an absence of engagement as a core element of the institutional mission at many colleges and universities.

This marginalization of engagement may reflect the demise of funding streams such as Learn and Serve America, which stimulated the development of teaching and learning programs in which community engagement was a central theme. Some observers suggest that it also reflects decreasing public support for higher education (which is ironic, since engagement is evidence of the public good that colleges and universities can provide).

Opportunities and Promising Practices

The greatest change in institutional capacity has been seen at those colleges and universities that have revised their promotion or tenure criteria to value CES as a form of scholarship. Portland State University was one of the first to do so when, in 1996, it revised its criteria for tenure, promotion, and merit increases, integrating definitions of scholarship derived from the work of Boyer, Glassick, et al. Many other institutions followed suit, whether in individual disciplines (such as dentistry at IUPUI or public health at UNC-Chapel Hill) or across the institution (e.g., at the University of Wisconsin and the University of Guelph).

Institutions can also demonstrate that they value the expertise and contributions of community partners by enabling them and other non-academic experts to participate in the review of faculty (as well as proposals, project submissions, curricula, etc.), even if as non-voting members.

Three experienced community partners involved in CCPH's Faculty for the Engaged Campus initiative identified changes to faculty review, promotion, and tenure procedures as critical in sustaining and institutionalizing community-university partnerships, and they called upon universities to solicit and value the input of community partners. They recommended that those partners share their expertise not only by serving as ad-hoc members of promotion or tenure review committees, drafting CES guidelines for promotion and tenure, and reviewing candidate portfolios but also by helping with faculty-development programs and writing letters that authenticate the work of community-engaged scholars.

> " Engagement is evidence of the public good that colleges and universities can provide.

> **Institutions that are committed to CES will emphasize this in their recruitment, naming CES as one of the desired qualifications in advertising and position announcements.**

The community advisory boards that are often formed to guide initiatives and projects can also advise departments and institutions about ways to increase appreciation of and recognition for CES—with the understanding that the time and expertise that community partners devote to these roles should be fairly compensated.

Some universities are implementing these ideas. The Faculty Engaged Scholars program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, for example, is co-directed by a community partner and involves others in teaching roles. The promotion and tenure policy of the Morgridge College of Education of the University of Denver allows candidates to select reviewers from settings outside the academy. As explained in the policy, these reviewers are "key community partners who are not academics by training, but who are experienced consumers of applied research and use academic scholarship for policy or organizational ends."

Institutions can require that an orientation or training for promotion or tenure committee members about the nature and value of CES be a prerequisite for participating in such reviews. California State University–Monterey Bay was one of the first institutions to require such training in the late 1990s, when it began its first rounds of tenure reviews as a new university. Faculty there reported that the training gave them new insights into how to conduct a peer review.

Through its Faculty for the Engaged Campus initiative, CCPH developed tools for assessing and increasing committee members' understanding and support for CES. New faculty and those taking on new roles such as dean or department chair would also benefit from such an orientation, since they will be in a position to mentor, nominate, vote on, or otherwise provide support to faculty engaged in CES. Although this may already happen in individual cases, institutional policy would ensure that the practice is widespread.

Institutions that are committed to CES will emphasize this in their recruitment, naming CES as one of the desired qualifications in advertising and position announcements and ensuring that candidates meet with key CES scholars and related institutional personnel during campus visits. The University of Guelph in Ontario, for example, recently announced several tenure-track faculty positions in CES in family relations and applied nutrition, geography, political science, psychology, sociology, and anthropology.

Institutional and community partners recognize that individual and collective capacity needs to be built on both sides for CES to work. An example of this is the University of Minnesota's curriculum to prepare community members and faculty to collaborate on community-based research projects (this product is published at www.CES4Health.info and is co-authored by academics and community partners).

In all cases, institutional leadership is key. At Portland State University, for example, faculty and administrators recognize that the change process that enabled it to rapidly implement revised promotion and tenure criteria more than 15 years ago was enabled by a visionary president and provost, who provided a "top-down" strategy while encouraging "bottom-up" participation and policy development by faculty. Those combined efforts resulted in institutional change that became embedded in the institution's culture and has been sustained through changes in leadership. Engagement has continued as a core mission there; it is fundamental to Portland State's identity.

AN AGENDA FOR ACTION

For universities to realize the promise of CES, institutional leaders must be open to change and be flexible, adaptable, and agile in pursuing it. Institutions must adopt policies that value and reward CES as a form of scholarship, while their leaders provide structural supports for faculty who are developing the relationships on which community-based learning and scholarship rely. Leaders must also make a genuine commitment to reciprocity in mutual capacity building.

> **Individual and collective capacity needs to be built on both sides for CES to work.**

Moving forward, universities, disciplinary organizations, and professional associations need to develop formal pathways that community-engaged scholars can follow in order to prepare to work effectively and respectfully with communities, to produce rigorous scholarship from their activities, and to successfully navigate the promotion and tenure review processes.

Disciplinary and other journals not specifically focused on CES need to ensure that their submission and review processes make room for articles that report CES findings. Special issues on CES are an effective strategy to begin this process. Guest editors and reviewers for such special issues need to be selected based on their expertise in CES and be provided with adequate orientation to the issues that arise in evaluating it.

Standard definitions of a "publication" and "impact" need to be expanded to include diverse scholarly products that both affect the community and add to the knowledge base within a discipline. Rethinking Peer Review, created by the authors, is an initiative in its early stages aimed at creating dialogue, research, and action on these issues.

Again, all of these actions require strong leadership—at the institutional level, within the faculty, and among community partners. Institutional leaders must be explicit about their commitment in speeches, webpages, and other materials, while their community partners hold them accountable for ensuring that their rhetoric reflects reality and leads to strategic actions and investments. Meanwhile, community-engaged faculty—especially tenured full professors—and their allies need to take on leadership roles that position them to be change agents within the academy.

While many institutions make claims about community connectedness through their mission statements and strategic plans, certain higher education organizations reinforce engagement as an institutional priority. National organizations whose missions emphasize community-university engagement include Community-Campus Partnerships for Health, Campus Compact, the Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities, International Association for Research on Service-Learning and Community Engagement, the Research University Community Engagement Network, the Engagement Scholarship Consortium, and Imagining America.

These networks are important venues for presenting scholarship, sharing best practices, and devising institutional change strategies. Through them, institutions wanting to advance CES as a priority can find like-minded institutions to serve as role models.

The downside of their proliferation, though, is that their effectiveness as a "movement" is limited by overlapping

> **"Standard definitions of a 'publication' and 'impact' need to be expanded to include diverse scholarly products that both affect the community and add to the knowledge base within a discipline.**

membership, a duplication of activities, and a lack of strategic collaboration. In 2006, an attempt to form an umbrella coalition among these groups failed in part because of the lack of a cohesive agenda for action. The time is right for these groups to re-convene to provide leadership to address the issues we raise here.

CONCLUSION

Our recommended reforms address two goals: to enhance community benefit and to help institutions value both community engagement and the scholarship that emerges from it. We want to see a higher education landscape where faculty, community partners, and institutions work together in reciprocal partnerships to build the capacity of all participants, educate students for their future roles in those communities, and advance scholarly inquiry that generates relevant and useful knowledge.

Many faculty inhabit dual worlds. They both want to succeed in the academy and to be contributing members of their communities. To be successful community-engaged scholars, they need academic training, community connections and grounding, the competencies required to work in communities, and appropriate values and attitudes.

We are not suggesting that CES be privileged over other forms of scholarship, or that all faculty pursue it, but rather that it be valued equally with other domains of scholarship. That is where the work must be focused in order for universities to fulfill their missions and provide the leadership needed to solve local and global challenges. ©