

The Engaged Dissertation: Exploring Trends in Doctoral Student Research

Audrey J. Jaeger, Jeremy B. Tuchmayer, and Shauna M. Morin

Abstract

This study explored the extent to which doctoral students are conducting community-engaged scholarship and investigated the characteristics of their degree-granting institutions. The research utilized the most immediate work of doctoral students by examining completed dissertations. Analysis showed which graduate students are pursuing community engagement through their scholarship, whether they are increasing in number, and the fields of study and institution types with which they are affiliated. By identifying who is producing engaged scholars, best practices can be identified in the future. In addition, the findings revealed which disciplines and institution types have room to increase their output of community-engaged research.

Introduction

In recent decades, community engagement has been a growing force in academia and has been increasingly recognized as a realm of faculty responsibility within higher education (Boyer, 1990). It has recently garnered greater attention in academia as the Carnegie Foundation solicits the first round of reapplications for its well-respected community engagement classification. Community-engaged scholarship has gained traction as a viable and valuable approach to faculty research, as evidenced by the emergence of academic journals that showcase engaged scholarly activities; formal and informal discussions about civic learning, civic engagement, democracy, and related topics taking place within academic communities; and development of community-engaged associations such as the Engagement Scholarship Consortium and others. In addition, academic discipline associations (e.g., those for public history, public anthropology, and social entrepreneurship) are expanding their efforts to engage communities and address critical societal issues, and are increasing efforts to prepare faculty for work in and with communities (Seifer, Blanchard, Jordan, Gelmon, & McGinley, 2012).

In keeping with these trends, there appears to be a growing interest in community-engaged research and teaching among graduate students (Garrison & Jaeger, *in press*; O'Meara & Jaeger, 2006). This interest is reflected in the development of initiatives such as

the Engagement Scholarship Consortium's Emerging Engagement Scholars Workshop and the International Association for Research on Service-Learning and Community Engagement (IARSLCE) Graduate Student Network. More broadly, community engagement is being recognized as a valuable component of graduate education that warrants greater attention and scholarly inquiry (Jaeger, Sandmann, & Kim, 2011).

Despite the movement toward community-engaged scholarship, faculty and graduate students who pursue this work often receive little support or guidance for their endeavors. Faculty must often determine for themselves how to build partnerships with community members, manage the logistical aspects of community engagement initiatives, and convey the significance of engaged work to colleagues. Doctoral students who choose to adopt a community-engaged approach to their dissertation research may find it difficult to identify a faculty advisor who understands and endorses this type of work. Moreover, professional development opportunities for faculty and graduate students interested in community engagement often prove to be inadequate (O'Meara & Jaeger, 2006; Seifer et al., 2012).

As we consider the future of community engagement on our respective campuses, it is important to understand how our future faculty are (or are not) trained to be engaged scholars, and in particular what opportunities they are afforded to participate in community-engaged teaching and research. There appears to be a heightened interest in community engagement among today's graduate students, but limited empirical evidence exists to demonstrate actual growth in the number of students incorporating it into their research. Thus, it is important to identify who is currently producing community-engaged scholarship, whether their numbers are increasing, and what factors may be influencing their decision to do so.

The current study explored the extent to which doctoral students were conducting community-engaged scholarship (CES) and characteristics of their degree-granting institutions. We used completed dissertations to consider the most recent work of doctoral students. Through our analyses, we identified the students pursuing community-engaged scholarship. Additionally, we examined trends in doctoral work focused on community engagement, which allowed us to see if higher numbers of current doctoral students are pursuing this type of scholarship as compared to previous years. Finally, we identified the fields of study and institution types with which these students were affiliated. By identifying who is

producing engaged scholars, we hope to initiate future exploration of best practices. We also believe this study offers new information about which institution types are producing the most community-engaged research, and in turn which institution types have a comparatively lower output of community-engaged research.

Literature Review

A commitment to the public good has long been a defining characteristic of American higher education. However, in the context of the contemporary research university, community engagement often takes a back seat to other institutional and departmental priorities. The literature suggests that specialized research within disciplines is most highly valued because it leads to sought-after publications in peer-reviewed journals and grant funding that is critical in the face of shrinking university budgets (*Moore & Ward, 2010; O'Meara & Jaeger, 2006; O'Meara & Rice, 2005; Weerts & Sandmann, 2008*). Such markers of success also carry significant weight in the recruitment, promotion, and tenure (RPT) process. Conversely, though CES is increasingly promoted at the institutional level, such work is often not rewarded within colleges and departments (*Jaeger, Jameson, & Clayton, 2012; Moore & Ward, 2010*).

The lack of recognition and support for scholarly engagement trickles down to shape the academy's preparation of future faculty. Today's doctoral students wish to engage in meaningful work that impacts the larger society (*Austin, 2002; Bloomfield, 2005*), yet graduate assistantships often focus on traditional teaching and research and fail to provide students with engagement opportunities within or beyond the institution (*O'Meara & Jaeger, 2006*). In a study of more than 4,000 doctoral students from a variety of institutions and disciplinary backgrounds, 61.2% expressed a strong interest in interdisciplinary research, a hallmark of community-engaged scholarship (*Golde & Dore, 2001, 2004*). However, only 27.1% of students surveyed believed their doctoral programs prepared them for scholarly collaboration across disciplines. Further, 52% of students indicated a desire to serve their communities, yet "this aspect of preparation [was] nearly absent" from their graduate preparation (*Golde & Dore, 2004, p. 27*).

The changing landscape of higher education as it relates to the faculty career poses another challenge for current doctoral students. Full-time tenured professorships are on the decline, while the number of part-time and non-tenure-track faculty appointments is increasing (*Schuster & Finkelstein, 2006*). The "proliferation

of part-time faculty members” is demonstrated by a 376% increase in part-time faculty members from 1969 to 2001, and the majority of full-time faculty hires since 1993 having been for off-track positions (*Schuster & Finkelstein, 2006, p. 40*). These shifts have led a growing number of graduate students to pursue nonacademic careers in their fields, which often require a different and more diversified skill set (*Day, Becerra, Ruiz, & Powe, 2012*).

Individuals at various levels of the educational system believe doctoral students must be prepared for a greater diversity of professional roles, and initiatives are under way to promote innovation in the realm of doctoral education (*Nyquist, 2002; Nyquist and Woodford, 2000; Walker, Golde, Jones, Bueschel, & Hutchings, 2008*). The Pew Charitable Trusts support an extensive repository of best practices in doctoral education, cataloguing approximately 350 strategies for change employed at nearly 100 institutions of higher education (*Nyquist, n.d.*). These strategies are intended to better prepare doctoral students for the myriad responsibilities and trajectories of nonfaculty careers. However, many graduate programs continue to groom doctoral students for what are in fact increasingly elusive faculty roles (*Walker et al., 2008*).

Community engagement offers an alternative approach to scholarship that better meets the demands facing today’s graduate students and the institutions in which they operate. It does so by making meaningful connections between research and interests of the larger society, thereby engendering greater public support (*Bloomfield, 2005*). In the face of diminishing budgets and policymakers’ demands for increased accountability, engaged scholarship demonstrates its utility by promoting academic inquiry relevant to pressing community needs. Further, it prepares students for career opportunities outside the academy and broadens their scope of knowledge through interactions with leaders in business, government, education, nonprofit, and other sectors (*Blee et al., 2008; Day et al., 2012*).

Even those who ultimately secure positions in academe will likely find new and evolving expectations placed upon them (*Austin, 2003*). The unique experiences and ways of thinking inherent in community-engaged scholarship will strengthen their ability to function more effectively in a dynamic higher education environment (*Blee et al., 2012*). For all students, regardless of professional aspirations, engaged scholarship can lead to reciprocal relationships between advisors and advisees that move beyond the one-directional model of doctoral student preparation (*Jaeger et al., 2011*). Such relationships foster the development of “intellectual

community,” which in turn enriches students’ educational experiences and enhances the quality of their doctoral programs (*Walker et al., 2008, p. 122*).

Efforts to capitalize on the many benefits of engaged scholarship are reflected in a movement toward community engagement as a component of graduate education. In recent years, forums and symposia sponsored by Tufts University, the University of Minnesota, and California Campus Compact have gathered leaders to identify challenges, opportunities, and best practices for civic and community engagement in graduate school (*O’Meara, 2007; Stanton, 2008*). Professional associations are also targeting doctoral students with engagement-focused training and development opportunities (*Engagement Scholarship Consortium, n.d.; IARSLCE, n.d.; Imagining America, n.d.*). At some institutions, students are taking the lead to incorporate community engagement into their own graduate experiences (*Blee et al., 2008; O’Meara, 2007*).

Perhaps most significantly, strides are being made to improve awareness and understanding of community engagement across disciplines (*O’Meara & Jaeger, 2006*). Increasingly, disciplines are acknowledging community engagement as a legitimate approach to scholarship in their fields (*O’Meara, 2007*). Initiatives like Preparing Future Faculty train teachers and researchers to contribute not only to their disciplines and institutions, but also to the community at large (*Pruitt-Logan & Gaff, 2004*). Finally, there have been many calls for doctoral programs to “focus less on improving disciplinary status and more on equipping faculty to improve the lives of citizens” (*Applegate, 2002, p. 2; O’Meara, 2007; Walker et al., 2008*).

At the institutional level, a growing awareness of and commitment to scholarly engagement is evidenced by the Community Engagement Elective Classification designated by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. This classification is awarded following a rigorous application process that requires colleges and universities to demonstrate full participation in the “mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity” (*Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, n.d.*). The classification is designed to recognize institutional achievements while also encouraging further growth and development in the area of community engagement (*Driscoll, 2009*). Gary Rhoades (2009), former general secretary of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), captures well the significance of the community engagement classification:

The first elective category to be developed was, significantly, community outreach and engagement. If the effect of Carnegie's efforts... in the first three quarters of the 20th century was to inscribe in academic structures and in the consciousness of faculty a national orientation, those organizations are increasingly emphasizing the value of the local. (p. 12)

In 2006, the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) instituted the President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll to realize its goal of engaging five million college students in service activities over a 5-year period (CNCS, 2007). The honor roll recognizes exemplary service contributions made by higher education institutions and highlights model community service programs at colleges and universities across the nation. From its inception in 2006, approximately 100 institutions per year have been recognized with distinction for their commitment to "solving community problems and placing more students on a lifelong path of civic engagement" (CNCS, 2013).

Sandmann, Saltmarsh, and O'Meara (2008) identified professional preparation for graduate students and institutionalization as two critical components of their model for advancing the scholarship of engagement. This approach is echoed throughout the literature, which suggests that instilling the value of engaged scholarship in today's doctoral students will facilitate its institutionalization by tomorrow's faculty (O'Meara & Jaeger, 2006; Stanton, 2008). Implicit in this assertion is a need for deeper understanding of factors that engender a commitment to community engagement among emerging scholars. The current study lays a foundation for exploring those factors by identifying the fields and institution types within which doctoral students are conducting community-engaged research.

Methodology

For this exploratory study, we elected not to use a specific theoretical framework that might constrain our initial investigation; rather, we allowed the literature to guide our research. However, we did draw from Schein's (1990) work on organizational culture when making decisions about analyses of the dissertations in our dataset. Schein discusses three levels of culture: artifacts, values, and assumptions. We focused primarily on artifacts (i.e., observable, tangible, and verbally identifiable cultural symbols), such as Carnegie's Community Engagement Elective Classification and

the President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll distinction. By identifying the disciplines from which the dissertations came, as well as the sponsoring institutional types and locations, we laid the groundwork for investigation of relevant values and assumptions within these contexts. Thus, in keeping with our exploratory approach, we paved the way for further examination of engaged scholarship, particularly through a cultural lens.

The methodological approach we employed is also worthy of note, as it cannot be easily classified as strictly quantitative or qualitative. Rather, it draws on elements of each paradigm, weaving them together into a cohesive analytical framework. To help organize the large volume of collected data, we incorporated some descriptive and correlational analyses within a content analysis framework. These descriptive statistics enhanced our ability to identify patterns and relationships across dissertations and institutions, thereby allowing us to make meaning of our qualitative findings.

Search Strategies

The genesis of this study was rooted in a seemingly simple question: To what extent is community-engaged scholarship (CES) conducted among doctoral students, and what are the characteristics of their degree-granting institutions? Since the focus of our study sought to identify commonalities within the dissertations themselves, as well as among the institutions where the CES originated, our research questions were twofold: (1a) What are the common characteristics of institutions at which community-engaged doctoral dissertations are produced? Furthermore, (1b) what is unique about the geographic location of the institutions at which community-engaged dissertations occur? (2) What are the common characteristics of dissertations focusing on community engagement, including field, year, methodology, and degree?

To answer these questions, we first sought to articulate a definition of CES that reflected its use in the literature and by the Carnegie Foundation. This proved somewhat difficult given the varied ways scholars have operationalized community engagement in their research. Ultimately, we chose to define community engagement as “the collaborative generation, refinement, conservation, and exchange of mutually beneficial and societally relevant knowledge that is communicated to and validated by peers in academe and the community” (*North Carolina State University, 2010, p. 3*). However, we acknowledge that CES is more broadly symbolic of a

particular type of study, one that fosters a reciprocal relationship between an individual or institution and the greater community.

Next, we attempted to identify and analyze all doctoral dissertations fitting the above description. An electronic in-text search using ProQuest's Dissertations and Theses database of the abstracts of all English-language doctoral dissertations published between 2001 and 2011 was conducted using the search terms *community engaged*, *community engagement*, *scholarship of engagement*, *engaged scholarship*, *scholarship and engagement*, and *community-based participatory research*. This search strategy allowed us to capture dissertations whose abstracts contained the aforementioned words. These search terms were strategically selected to maximize the number of qualified dissertations identified while simultaneously limiting the volume of documents returned to a manageable size. In addition, prominent researchers who practice community-engaged scholarship in the field of higher education were asked to provide the names and dissertation titles of student advisees who completed a dissertation that satisfied the inclusion criteria. These additional dissertations served to triangulate our findings and confirmed we had captured as many applicable dissertations as possible in our search.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

For inclusion in this study, dissertations had to meet at least one of the following *a priori* criteria: The researcher intended to address a community need; implications for furthering community engaged research were articulated; or the practice of community engaged scholarship, including factors that prevent or encourage participation therein, were examined. Dissertations were excluded from our analysis if community engagement was not central to the purpose of the study or the research design, the researcher did not interact with members of the community in some capacity, or study implications were not explicitly connected to a relevant community issue.

Our literature search yielded 552 dissertations from among several hundred thousand produced within the timeframe. Of these, 418 were deemed inappropriate for inclusion because the dissertations did not satisfy the criteria set forth for our analysis. An additional 12 dissertations were identified as duplicates and were removed from analysis. Finally, seven dissertations were added to the study upon triangulation of the data. Ultimately, 129

dissertations from 90 institutions satisfied the criteria for inclusion in this study.

Coding and Triangulation

Consistent with good practice in qualitative research, we divided the 552 dissertations produced by the initial literature search among three independent researchers for sorting purposes. Dissertations were categorized into three groupings (*yes, no, maybe*) by reading the abstracts and analyzing them within the context of the inclusion criteria. This initial sorting yielded 124 affirmatives, 95 possibilities, and 333 rejections. Next, each researcher was assigned a sorted grouping for review, and the abstracts were read and analyzed a second time. This second sorting resulted in five affirmative dissertations recoded as possibilities and seven possibilities recoded as affirmatives, resulting in 126 dissertations designated for inclusion. Of the 95 initial possibilities, 81 were recoded as rejections, seven remained as possibilities, seven were recoded as affirmatives, and five were added from the affirmative grouping, resulting in 12 remaining possibilities. None of the dissertations initially sorted as rejections were recoded. Eighty-one dissertations from the possibility grouping were rejected upon completion of the second abstract review, resulting in 414 rejections from the study.

Finally, all three researchers came together to discuss changes made after the second sorting. The seven dissertations added to the affirmative grouping were retained. Of the 12 remaining possibilities, six were added to the affirmative grouping ($N = 132$) and six were added to the rejection grouping ($N = 420$). In the process of organizing the dissertations for analysis, as previously noted, 12 duplicates were identified and removed (10 from the affirmative and two from the rejection grouping), resulting in 122 doctoral dissertations identified for inclusion (and 418 excluded) through our search of the literature.

Given the exploratory nature of our study, we felt it was important to minimize possible gaps in our search by reviewing dissertations designated as engaged by experts in the field. Thus, our triangulation efforts included communication with 15 leading scholars in higher education whose research focuses on or reflects CES. These individuals identified doctoral students or advisees that they considered to be engaged scholars. In addition, we examined seven dissertations selected for the IARSLCE dissertation of the year (or honorable mention) award. In all, our triangulation efforts yielded 15 additional dissertations for consideration. Among them,

five had already been captured in our literature search, one had a publication date that fell outside our designated time frame, two did not meet the criteria for inclusion (i.e., solely service-learning, not community-engaged), and seven were added to the study. Our final analytic sample included 129 doctoral dissertations from 90 separate institutions that satisfied the inclusion criteria.

Data Extraction

A standard data collection template was created to extract the following data from all 129 dissertations satisfying the criteria for inclusion in this study: country, state, institution, department, program, topic, author, advisor, committee members, methodological approach, methodology, type of engagement, degree, and year of publication. United States Census regions and divisions were determined by the state where each dissertation was produced and were also added to the data template. Much of this information was collected from the citation index exported from ProQuest's Dissertations and Theses database, and any missing data was culled directly from the dissertation. For instance, three quarters of the dissertation abstracts described the methodology underpinning the study; however, for the remaining one quarter, the researchers read the methodology section of the dissertation in order to determine the methodology. Finally, in some instances it was difficult to determine the department or program of study simply by looking at the title page or the citation index. To collect this missing information, we relied on the classification of the major advisor at the time the dissertation was published in conjunction with the topic of the dissertation. In order to make sense of this data, department and program classifications were aggregated into larger typologies for analysis and interpretation (e.g., education, public health, public administration).

Next, we included the Carnegie Classification, the Community Engagement Elective Classification, and land-grant status of the institutions in our sample. These data were provided by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. Finally, we reviewed the President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll lists from 2006 to 2013 and noted how many times, if any, institutions in our sample had won the award or had been recognized on the honor roll *with distinction*. The application and selection process for the President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll is rigorous. By restricting our classification to institutions that were recognized with distinction or better, the selectivity of this measure was greatly increased.

Analysis

To facilitate analysis, the data were imported into STATA 12, a statistical analysis software package commonly used among social science researchers. Frequencies, cross-tabulations, and correlations were run on a majority of the variables in the data using both the dissertations and their respective institutions as units of analysis. Examining the frequency distributions of the data allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the individual elements of the dissertations and the institutions in this study.

Results

Of the 129 dissertations from 90 institutions we examined, 92% ($N = 118$) were published from American institutions ($N = 83$), with the remaining 8% ($N = 11$) originating from Canadian institutions ($N = 7$). To address our first research question examining the common characteristics of institutions where community-engaged scholarship occurred at the doctoral level, we analyzed our sample using institutions as the unit of analysis; to address the second research question, our unit of analysis was the dissertation. Although 90 institutions qualified for inclusion in this study, the seven Canadian institutions lacked Carnegie Classification data and were therefore excluded from the institutional-level analysis.

Institutional-Level Analysis

Among the 83 American institutions, 82% were classified as doctoral/research universities (55 doctoral extensive; 13 doctoral intensive), 6% were master's-level institutions ($N = 5$), 2% were baccalaureate institutions ($N = 2$), and the remaining 10% were specialized institutions ($N = 8$; e.g., institutions that typically award a majority of their degrees in a single field such as separate medical or health profession schools). Twenty-eight percent of the universities ($N = 23$) were classified as land-grant institutions, 39% ($N = 32$) had received the President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll with Distinction, and 45% ($N = 37$) were awarded the Community Engagement Elective Classification (CE) by the Carnegie Foundation.

Slightly more than half of the institutions examined (52%, $N = 43$) received at least one of the aforementioned designations (honor roll, elective classification, or both), and 60% ($N = 26$) of those institutions were recognized with both the Carnegie Community Engagement Elective Classification and the honor roll with distinction. A strong positive relationship was observed between institu-

tions that received the CE elective classification and the President's Honor Roll with Distinction designation, $r(81) = .58, p < .001$. A small, positive relationship was found between land-grant institutions and those with the CE classification, $r(81) = .26, p = .019$. Although no significant relationship was found between land-grant institutions and those receiving the honor roll designation, $r(81) = .12, p = .288$, a small, positive relationship was also found between land-grant institutions and those who received at least one of the aforementioned designations (i.e., honor roll, CE, or both), $r(81) = .22, p = .046$.

In examining the unique characteristics associated with the location of the institutions in our study, we used both institutions and dissertations as units of analysis (see Table 1). Of the 90 institutions in our study, 26 produced more than one qualifying dissertation between 2001 and 2011. When controlling for institutions that produced multiple dissertations (i.e., using institutions as the unit of analysis), we found that no particular region of the country had greater influence than any other region in the production of community-engaged scholarship at the doctoral level. With institutions as the unit of analysis, doctoral participation in community-engaged scholarship was roughly equal, with each of the four United States Census Regions representing between 20 and 27 percent of the country. However, as Table 1 illustrates, when dissertations served as the unit of analysis, thereby allowing institutions that produced more than one dissertation to be counted more than once, we found that West Coast institutions are more productive, publishing almost twice as many dissertations as those in the Northeast, and nearly 10 percentage points more than the those of next highest region (the Midwest).

Table 1. Community-Engaged Dissertations and Institutions by Census Region and Division

	Institutions		Dissertations	
	N	%	N	%
Northeast	18	20.0	21	16.3
New England (1)	7	7.8	8	6.2
Mid-Atlantic (2)	11	12.2	13	10.1
Midwest	21	23.3	30	23.2
East North Central (3)	15	16.7	23	17.8
West North Central (4)	6	6.6	7	5.4

South	20	22.2	25	19.4
South Atlantic (5)	12	13.3	16	12.4
East South Central (6)	2	2.2	2	1.6
West South Central (7)	6	6.6	7	5.4
West	24	26.7	42	32.6
Mountain (8)	5	5.6	7	5.5
Pacific (9)	19	21.1	35	27.1
Canada	7	7.8	11	8.5
Total	90	100.0	129	100.0

Dissertation as Unit of Analysis

In order to address the common characteristics of the dissertations identified in this study, we examined the degree awarded, field of study, methodology, and year of publication. Of the dissertations examined, 80% ($N = 103$) fulfilled the requirements for the doctor of philosophy (Ph.D.) degree, with 19 percent ($N = 24$) earning the doctor of education (Ed.D.) degree. The remaining 1% of dissertations qualified for the doctor of psychology (Psy.D.) and the doctor of public health (Dr.P.H.) degrees (one each). As Table 2 demonstrates, a large plurality of community-engaged dissertations from 2001 to 2011 were in the field of education (39%, $N = 50$). The next largest field of study, public health, had less than half as many dissertations as did education (17%, $N = 22$).

Table 2. Field of Study

	<i>N</i>	%
Education	50	38.8
Public health	22	17.1
Anthropology, psychology, & sociology	14	10.8
Public administration, policy, & planning	11	8.5
English & communication	9	7.0
Other professional	14	10.8
Other social science	9	7.0
Total	129	100.0

The methodological approaches employed in the dissertations studied varied significantly. Roughly one quarter ($N = 31$) of all dissertations utilized either a strictly quantitative or mixed-methods approach. An equal number ($N = 31$) utilized case study as the methodological approach, with the remaining dissertations representing a somewhat balanced distribution across various approaches to qualitative inquiry (e.g., ethnography, participatory research, narrative, phenomenology, and grounded theory). For example, a sizable number of these dissertations employed ethnography ($N = 21$), participatory research ($N = 16$), or grounded theory ($N = 13$) as methodological approaches to qualitative inquiry (see Table 3).

Table 3. Methodology

	<i>N</i>	%
Case Study	31	24.0
Quantitative & mixed methods	31	24.0
Ethnography	21	16.3
Participatory research	16	12.4
Hermeneutics, narrative, & phenomenology	15	11.6
Grounded theory	13	10.1
Other	2	1.5
Total	129	100.0

With respect to year of publication, tremendous growth was observed in the number of engaged dissertations produced in the later years of our study. Over the 11-year period examined, nearly 72% ($N = 93$) of the dissertations we identified were published in the last 4 years (2008–2011), with roughly half of the total (46%, $N = 59$) produced in the last 2 years. In the first 5 years of the study, only 20 community engaged dissertations were produced. A steady increase in the number of engaged dissertations was observed beginning in 2006, with the largest growth occurring in the last 3 years (see Table 4).

Table 4. Year of Publication

	Dissertations	
	<i>N</i>	%
2001	4	3.1
2002	5	3.9
2003	4	3.1
2004	6	4.6
2005	1	0.8
2006	8	6.2
2007	8	6.2
2008	12	9.3
2009	22	17.1
2010	30	23.2
2011	29	22.5
Total	129	100.0

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the extent to which community-engaged scholarship is produced among doctoral students and institutions of higher education. Our analysis was therefore performed on two groups: institutions and dissertations. Our results highlight several important observations. Among institutions, community-engaged doctoral scholarship appears to occur more frequently at institutions recognized for a commitment to community engagement. Across dissertations, such work appears to occur more frequently in the fields of education and public health, employs one of several qualitative techniques, and is a relatively recent phenomenon.

Institutional Characteristics

Nearly 60 percent of dissertations analyzed were from institutions that received the Carnegie Community Engagement Elective Classification, the President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll with Distinction recognition, or both (excluding the 11 dissertations from Canadian institutions that were ineligible for these distinctions). Further, upon examination of institutions in our study that received these designations, we found a strong positive relationship between the Carnegie engagement classification and the President's Honor Roll distinction. These findings suggest that not only are community-engaged institutions under-

going rigorous and time-consuming processes to be acknowledged for their efforts, they are often seeking recognition from multiple sources. The findings also raise several important questions: Will the Carnegie classification continue to be relevant as more individuals engage in this form of scholarship and more institutions are recognized (Holland, 2005; Sandmann, Thornton, & Jaeger, 2009)? If the same institutions are being recognized both by Carnegie and the Corporation for National and Community Service, will these honors ultimately become redundant? Conversely, might these forms of recognition give rise to new distinctions that encompass a greater diversity of approaches (Sandmann et al., 2009), or will distinctions cease to be necessary?

Not surprisingly, we also identified a positive relationship between land-grant institutions and the Carnegie community engagement classification. As mentioned in the literature review, community engagement has the potential to better prepare doctoral students for the current job market and to help institutions better serve the larger society. Community engagement is a tool for land-grant institutions to more explicitly carry out their missions (Holland, 2005). Activities that support such efforts often align closely with the mission of land-grant universities as they partner with for-profit, nonprofit, and government organizations to meet the real and practical needs within their states (Zuiches, 2008). Furthermore, in recent years the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities and the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities have encouraged land-grant institutions to expand and seek formal recognition for their community-engaged practices (Sandmann et al., 2009). Thus, it seems appropriate that many of these universities would seek—and receive—the Carnegie elective classification for their mission-driven community engagement activities.

Finally, we observed that West Coast institutions appear to be the standard bearers for the community engagement movement, attracting doctoral students interested in engaged scholarship and encouraging them to incorporate it into their dissertations. Among the institutions with more than two qualified dissertations, Portland State University stood out among all institutions with six. Other productive West Coast institutions included two in the University of California system: Berkeley (four) and Los Angeles (three), as well as the University of Washington (three). The only other American institutions with more than two qualified dissertations were the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee (four); The

Pennsylvania State University (three); and the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill (three).

Although the influence of West Coast institutions might be an example of institutional isomorphism (*DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, 1991*), it is important to note that some of these institutions, Portland State University (PSU) in particular, have been leaders in the community engagement conversation nationwide. The PSU mission clearly reflects its commitment to community and civic engagement:

PSU values its identity as an engaged university that promotes a reciprocal relationship between the community and the University in which knowledge serves the city and the city contributes to the knowledge of the University. We value our partnerships with other institutions, professional groups, the business community, and community organizations, and the talents and expertise these partnerships bring to the University. We embrace our role as a responsible citizen of the city, the state, the region, and the global community and foster actions, programs, and scholarship that will lead to a sustainable future. (*PSU, "Community and Civic Engagement," 2013*)

Characteristics of Dissertations

A little more than half of all dissertations were in the fields of education and public health. Professional degree programs are strongly connected to the communities they serve and often offer experiential, community-based education programs. In fact,

public health and medical programs are far ahead of many other disciplines in having established permanent long-term partnerships between graduate programs and medical clinics. Perhaps because of the necessity of engaging the public in studies of disease, clinical trials, and rehabilitation programs, these programs have developed many innovative ways of linking graduate study with individual and community needs. (*O'Meara & Jaeger, 2006, p. 18*)

In the last decade, many other disciplines have followed suit, with associations creating new focus areas or repurposing existing specialty projects to address the public aspects of their work. To

that end, fields such as public history, public anthropology, public sociology, and even engineering have seen growth in service-learning and community-engaged scholarship (O'Meara & Jaeger, 2006). Our analysis confirms this trend, having identified dissertations from each of the aforementioned fields, including two in civil engineering, with only one notable exception: public history (see discussion in the Limitations section).

With respect to methodology, we found that approaches employed by doctoral students to explore engaged scholarship represented all five domains of qualitative inquiry (Creswell, 2013). Collectively, these qualitative studies comprised nearly three quarters of the dissertations examined. Indeed, qualitative methodologies align well with the objectives of community-engaged research, as they allow scholars to “make sense of a situation without imposing preexisting expectations on the phenomena under study” (Mertens, 2010, p. 225). In so doing, researchers create space for the emergence of collaborative and innovative approaches to societal problems. From a more pragmatic perspective, qualitative methods are appropriate when there is not a quantitative approach that adequately addresses the research questions (Mertens, 2010). In the case of community-engaged research, quantitative analysis may illuminate the *who* and *what* aspects of community engagement, but it does not give voice to participants in a way that represents them fully in the research process.

Finally, we noted that over the 11-year time period identified in our study, nearly 75% of all dissertations that qualified for our study were published in the last 4 years (2008–2011), with slightly less than half produced in the last 2 years alone. It is perhaps no coincidence that both Carnegie's Community Engagement Elective Classification and the President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll both began in 2006, the year our study identified as the beginning of the upward trend in community-engaged doctoral scholarship. As community engagement principles and practices become more widely adopted within the field of higher education, we expect to see them reflected not only in faculty research but also in a variety of academic and cocurricular programs at institutions. Scholars who adopt community-engaged practices as doctoral students will play a critical role in increasing the scope and impact of community engagement across the higher education landscape by modeling such practices throughout their careers as faculty members.

Limitations

Our study is limited in several important ways. First, no exhaustive catalogue exists for all doctoral dissertations, though ProQuest is the most comprehensive dissertation repository with more than 2.7 million entries. Nearly every accredited institution in North America that awards doctoral degrees submits their dissertations to ProQuest for publication or indexing. In 1998, the Library of Congress recognized UMI (later acquired by ProQuest) as the official offsite repository of the Digital Dissertations Library. ProQuest estimates that between 95 and 98 percent of all U.S. doctoral dissertations are included in its database.

Second, authors are solely responsible for indexing their dissertations, meaning that each individual author decides what terms to include (or exclude) for the purpose of keyword searches. Consequently, no central taxonomy or uniform guidelines exist for students to catalogue their work or classify it as community-engaged. We therefore relied on in-text searches to maximize the likelihood of capturing all available dissertations that met our criteria. Further, we utilized triangulation techniques to identify any prominent dissertations that the search terms may have missed. Nevertheless, it is possible some relevant works were inadvertently excluded as a result of our search strategy.

Third, because our initial full-text searches yielded almost 35,000 dissertations, we restricted our search to the text of dissertation abstracts. We reasoned that if the authors failed to mention our search terms in their abstracts, the concepts the terms represent were likely not central to their research. However, the length and depth of dissertation abstracts vary widely, both within and across disciplines, stymying attempts to fully and accurately capture CES through the examination of abstracts alone.

Finally, although intentionally selected, our search terms may have excluded otherwise qualified dissertations from certain fields of study. Using reciprocal relationships between communities and universities as a primary measure of CES eliminated dissertations that some researchers would identify as community-engaged (e.g., study of a service-learning class). However, in the interest of consistency, we felt it was important to use search terms that reflected the definition of community engagement most commonly recognized as we set forth at the beginning of the study.

Some may also argue that our search terms were too narrow, utilizing only the most common terms associated with engaged scholarship. We recognize that scholars in certain fields may use

terminology to describe CES that is distinct from our search terms, a limitation brought to light by the fact that we did not capture any public history dissertations in our search despite literature suggesting that CES is frequently utilized among public historians (O'Meara & Jaeger, 2006). This finding suggests that efforts to identify engaged dissertations might have been enhanced by a broader triangulation effort, one that included scholars from a diverse array of academic fields. However, the time and resources necessary to identify and access engaged scholars across disciplines were beyond the scope of the current study.

Implications

In "Reclaiming the Democratic Purposes of American Higher Education," Matthew Hartley (2009) documents the recent evolution of an education reform movement toward reaffirming higher education's historic civic purposes. What began as an increased commitment to community service in the 1980s expanded to include academic service-learning in the 1990s. The emergence of the "engaged institution," endorsed in 1999 by the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities, represents the most recent phase of the movement and the one in which we currently find ourselves (Hartley, 2009). Hartley argues that we are at a crossroads in our efforts to propagate civic participation within higher education and must determine "whether to seek broad-based legitimacy within the academy by aligning the efforts with disciplinary norms or to challenge the status quo and attempt to transform higher education and align its efforts with the pressing needs of America's democracy" (p. 11).

In our review of the literature for this study, it is apparent that community-engaged scholarship in its current form reflects aspects of both trajectories outlined above. Attention to societal needs is at the heart of community-engaged research as we have defined it, yet efforts to promote this form of scholarship have been incrementally introduced, perhaps so as not to disrupt the long-standing structures and norms of academia. Given the recent surge in community-engaged doctoral research documented in this study, it seems likely that today's emerging scholars will be instrumental in determining future directions of the higher education reform movement. In particular, they will have the capacity to shape practice for doctoral education by redefining the advisor/advisee relationship, developing relevant professional development opportunities, and preparing future faculty for changing roles in academe.

Knowing what we do about the overall increase in community-engaged scholarship among doctoral students raises numerous questions to be addressed in future research. First, it would behoove us to explore whether the institution of Carnegie's Community Engagement Elective Classification and the President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll have contributed to the recent increase in engaged doctoral research, or if the reverse is true. It would be valuable to understand how these initiatives influence (or are influenced by) scholarly engagement, particularly in comparison to other aspects of the current movement (e.g., efforts of disciplinary associations to promote and support community engaged practices).

Second, as we have identified several institutions leading the charge in terms of community-engaged scholarship among doctoral students, it may now be possible to examine what unique characteristics of these institutions promote engaged practices among emerging scholars. Does the institution type or context play a significant role, as our findings suggest in the case of land-grant universities? Alternately, have institutions such as PSU adopted approaches to advising and mentoring doctoral students that foster interest in scholarly engagement? What types of influence do advisors exercise with respect to the development of engaged dissertations? Are there implicit values and assumptions embedded in the culture of certain institutions that guide faculty and graduate student research? Answers to these questions could inform best practices for other institutions seeking to enhance their commitment to community-engaged research.

Finally, we propose that further investigation into the prevalence of engaged scholarship within various disciplines is warranted, especially given the unequal distribution of engaged dissertations we identified in our study. It seems that some fields have been instrumental in furthering the movement that Hartley (2009) described, while others may be virtually removed from it. In disciplines such as education and public health, it would be useful to ascertain what forces promote doctoral engaged scholarship, whether it be the curriculum, faculty predisposition, reward structures, efforts of disciplinary associations, or some combination of these factors. By gaining insight into best practices in particular fields, it may be possible to identify which strategies can "be modified to suit local contexts," thereby enabling them to "gain broader currency" in the field of higher education (Hartley, 2009, p. 24).

Conclusions

Our exploratory study of engaged research among today's doctoral students yielded four key findings worthy of note. First, there is a positive relationship between external recognition for community-engaged practices and the propensity of recognized institutions to produce engaged dissertations, which suggests that the Carnegie Classification and the President's Honor Roll are successful in identifying universities that act upon, rather than simply espouse, a commitment to community engagement. Second, some of these institutions are contributing to the current reform movement by producing an impressive number of engaged scholars, several of whom will likely serve as the next generation of higher education faculty. Third, select disciplines are also taking the lead in advancing engaged scholarship as an aspect of doctoral education and may serve as models for encouraging community-engaged practices on a broader scale. Finally, important next steps in this area of research include deeper exploration of who is conducting community-engaged scholarship and what individuals, experiences, and environments are shaping their behavior. It is hoped that our initial investigation will stimulate further inquiry into this burgeoning dimension of higher education.

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About the Authors

Audrey J. Jaeger is the alumni distinguished graduate professor in the Department of Leadership, Policy and Adult and Higher Education at NC State University. Jaeger's research examines relationships and experiences among faculty and students that illuminate issues of transition, access, climate, agency, and civic and community engagement. Jaeger earned her Ph.D. from New York University.

Jeremy B. Tuchmayer is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Leadership, Policy and Adult and Higher Education at NC State University. His research examines the ways that state and institutional policies and structures facilitate student success, as well as labor market effects, graduate school aspirations, and commitment to civic and community engagement of recent college graduates. Tuchmayer earned his master's degree from Vanderbilt University.

Shauna M. Morin is a doctoral student in the Department of Leadership, Policy and Adult and Higher Education at NC State University. Her research explores religion, spirituality, and worldview diversity among college students, culture and institutional identity at sectarian colleges and universities, and community engagement practices in higher education. Morin earned her master's degree from Pennsylvania State University.