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The Scholarship of Engagement: A Taxonomy of Five Emerging Practices

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Abstract

A new form of scholarship, the scholarship of engagement, is emerging as a distinct set of practices within the general movement toward civic renewal in American higher education. This essay defines the core aspects of the scholarship of engagement and creates a taxonomy of five forms of engaged scholarship. Using a problem-driven, pluralistic approach, this essay concludes that the new forms of engaged scholarship each make important contributions to the civic renewal of American higher education and collectively constitute an exciting and growing movement.

Introduction

A new form of scholarship is emerging as a distinctive set of practices among the general movement toward civic renewal in American higher education. Commonly referred to as the scholarship of engagement, this movement reflects a growing interest in broadening and deepening the public aspects of academic scholarship. Reacting to the disconnect between academics and the public, in somewhat dialectical fashion scholars are finding creative ways to communicate to public audiences, work for the public good, and, most important, generate knowledge with public participation.

Scholars in American higher education are finding a variety of exciting ways to contribute to the scholarship of engagement. However, such variety and complexity can make sorting out the particular contributions of each approach a daunting task. Many terms associated with engaged scholarship are applied to overlapping concepts in ways that seem conflicting, confusing, or redundant. This taxonomic inconsistency is an especially serious problem as engaged scholars are trying to make the case in the clearest possible terms that their scholarship is at least as rigorous as traditional academic work. In this paper I suggest a problem-driven framework by which to approach the theories, research questions, and methods of engaged scholarship. I first define the core elements of engaged scholarship. I then develop a practical

taxonomy of the common practices of the scholarship of engagement. I conclude that the scholarship of engagement constitutes a distinct, important, and growing movement in American higher education that serves to broaden and deepen the connection between scholars and the public realm.

The Scholarship of Engagement as a Distinct Set of Practices

A clear sign of the trend toward engaged scholarship is the growing number of centers with an emphasis on civic engagement that have been established in recent years at higher education institutions around the country (see appendix).[1] These are typically freestanding entities, with mission statements and staff that are independent of pre-existing service-learning offices and other centers that have been associated with other forms of civic renewal. This essay is the outcome of a research project that reviewed the efforts of these organizations with a focus on their distinctive practices and the contributions they make to the public realm. My contention is that the work being done at these centers is increasingly using the terminology of the scholarship of engagement and that this terminology in fact best captures the distinctive focus of this work.

The "scholarship of engagement" terminology derives from the work of the late Ernest Boyer, a former president of the Carnegie Academy for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning. Boyer's original concern was to broaden the definition of scholarship beyond research to include the scholarship of teaching, application, and integration *(Boyer 1990)*. In his later work, however, Boyer argued that his own framework should be further broadened to include the scholarship of engagement *(Boyer 1996)*. In this phrase Boyer used "scholarship" to indicate practices that cut across the categories of academic scholarship he had previously identified and "engagement" to suggest a reciprocal, collaborative relationship with a public entity. The scholarship of engagement, then, consists of (1) research, teaching, integration, and application scholarship that (2) incorporate reciprocal practices of civic engagement into the production of knowledge. It tends to be used inclusively to describe a host of practices cutting across disciplinary boundaries and teaching, research, and outreach functions in which scholars communicate to and work both for and with communities. These kinds of scholarship have been the subject of an increasing number of literature reviews, case studies, and reports *(Ward 2003; Ostrander 2004; Votruba et al. 2002)*.

The scholarship of engagement is primarily framed as a challenge to mainstream academic scholarship.[1] Engaged scholarship is a reaction to three related trends in American higher education. First, engaged scholars are concerned with the increasing specialization of academic knowledge into discrete disciplines, each of which produces highly complex and technical knowledge that is not effectively communicated to the public. The result is a select group of expert knowers institutionally separate from the lay public rather than a genuinely democratic approach to the production of knowledge. Engaged scholars argue that mainstream academic scholarship has less—not more—epistemological legitimacy because its claims to knowledge are made in isolation from social practices and public participation *(Schon 1995)*. Second, engaged scholars are reacting to the dominance of positivist epistemology, which emphasizes value neutrality and objectivity rather than effectiveness as the criteria for assessing knowledge. This epistemology has had the unintended consequence of idealizing distance from rather than engagement with the value-laden problems of politics and society (*Checkoway 2000)*. Finally, engaged scholars are concerned with the growing corporate influence on the culture of higher education and the resulting privatization of the academy *(Press and Washburn 2000; Bollier 2002)*. By encouraging public participation in the production of scholarship and scholarship that addresses public problems, the scholarship of engagement seeks to reverse or at least ameliorate these trends.

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The scholarship of engagement is primarily a reaction against trends in traditional modes of scholarship, but it also tends to be framed as a departure from other ways of talking about civic renewal in the higher education community. The aim is not to replace previous forms of scholarship but rather to broaden and deepen the possibilities for civic engagement in higher education.

First, as scholarship, the scholarship of engagement applies to a broader set of academic functions than alternative ways of framing civic engagement. Service-learning and experiential

learning are two well-known practices that incorporate civic involvement in the classroom. Scholars are now recognizing that teaching is not the only academic function that can benefit from civic engagement. Rather, researchers in the natural and social sciences are incorporating community involvement into their work, as are application scholars in the outreach and extension divisions of land-grant universities. By emphasizing "scholarship" rather than "learning," the scholarship of engagement suggests a set of practices that cuts across all aspects of the traditional functions of higher education.

Second, the language of scholarship suggests a conscious effort to bring a greater sense of rigor and clarity to civic renewal efforts in higher education. Engaged scholars are making the case that their practices constitute serious scholarship capable of meeting or even exceeding traditional academic standards. By working with communities in the processes of research, scholars can generate research questions, widen the field of potential data sources, and test findings as well as (and sometimes better than!) colleagues practicing normal academic scholarship. Similarly, scholars in outreach and extension divisions are demonstrating that the scholarship of application can be enhanced in unique ways through practices of engagement. At least one organization, the National Review Board for the Scholarship of Engagement, is developing engagement-specific assessment criteria for use in promotion and tenure decisions *(Sandmann 2003)*.

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Third, the scholarship of engagement is distinctive for its focus on a relatively specific set of practices unified by the aim to deepen forms of community involvement. The language of engagement suggests an element of reciprocal and collaborative knowledge production that is unique to these forms of scholarship. One might say that engagement requires not only communication *to* public audiences, but also collaboration *with* communities in the production of knowledge. This element is sometimes lacking in other practices often associated with civic engagement. "Public

intellectuals," for example, are typically identified by a conscious effort to communicate their scholarship to public audiences, but the scholarship itself is not qualitatively different from typical academic scholarship in the way it is produced. Similarly, service-learning may aim at using the expertise of scholars and/or students to fill a public need without stressing how the public might participate in the process.

Instead of seeing the public as a passive recipient of expert knowledge, engaged scholarship stresses that the public can itself contribute to academic knowledge. In their undergraduate teaching, engaged scholars typically make a conscious effort to stress the pedagogical value of collaborating *with* publics instead of providing information *to* or services *for* publics. For example, engaged scholars contend that their methods can provide students with deeper insight into public problems than that reflected in the broad sense of civic duty provided by service *(Morton and Enos 2002)*. Similarly, engaged scholars are showing how research and outreach scholarship can be enhanced by collaboration with the public, exposing scholars to new sources of data and providing opportunities for greater experimentation in the production of academic knowledge. These scholars are showing that civic engagement is not just charity that academics do on their own time in addition to their work. Rather, engaged scholars see collaboration with the public as itself constituting scholarly practice that fulfills traditional academic functions. These reciprocal and collaborative elements may be implicit or unconsciously present in other forms of scholarship—especially those that are often associated with civic engagement—but they are explicitly and consciously cultivated in the scholarship of engagement.

These distinctions are not meant to imply that other forms of scholarship ought to be abandoned in lieu of the scholarship of engagement. There is no reason that engaged scholarship cannot coexist with service-learning, public intellectual scholarship, or even traditional academic scholarship. The idea is not that other forms of scholarship are radically flawed but rather that they are incomplete. Nevertheless, engaged scholars share a common conviction that the civic renewal of higher education can be broadened to include research and deepened to provide a greater sense of intellectual rigor and of working with the public in genuinely collaborative fashion. For these reasons the scholarship of engagement constitutes a distinct and important movement in the contemporary practice of higher education in America.

Five Practices of Engagement: A Taxonomy

Keeping in mind the above general definition of engaged scholarship and its points of departure from traditional conceptions of both scholarship and civic renewal, I now develop a taxonomy of five commonly referenced approaches to engaged scholarship. I used three critical sources in developing this taxonomy: a review of the existing literature on the scholarship of engagement; a review of Web sites and publications of civic engagement centers at higher education institutions; and interviews with practitioners who identify with the scholarship of engagement or its associated practices. Based on this research, I proceeded inductively and identified five common practices that either explicitly identify with the scholarship of engagement or at least meet the criteria of the definition outlined above: public scholarship, participatory research, community partnerships, public information networks, and civic literacy scholarship. I contend that each of these practices incorporates its own methodology, influenced by a specific conception of democracy, in response to a particular set of problems. In the following taxonomy, I attempt to identify the methods, core animating principles, problems addressed, and one or two instances of exemplary scholarship in each area.

Admittedly, the terminology used to describe the world of engaged scholarship is in reality often used in more complex and overlapping fashion than this taxonomy will suggest. Like the scholarship of engagement itself, all of these practices are still "works in progress" with no fully settled definition. As my title suggests, I consider these practices to be emerging rather than having an established orthodoxy. They are so closely related that they are often confused with one another, even by the practitioners themselves. Indeed, many of the practitioners that I would associate with these particular fields and with the scholarship of engagement in general may well employ other terminology to describe their work. Nevertheless, I hope it will be productive to begin to develop a set of categories that captures the full complexity of this movement and establishes clear connections to the problems driving these approaches. The following taxonomy should, therefore, be viewed not as determinative of the full complexity with which these terms are being employed, but rather as a set of ideal types that builds on current practices to guide future work in the field.

First, *public scholarship* is a central focus of the scholarship of engagement. While its precise definition is an open question,

public scholarship is most often used to describe academic work that incorporates deliberative practices such as forums and town meetings to enhance scholarship and address public problems. Its practitioners are usually informed by some combination of the deliberative or participatory conceptions of democracy advanced by theorists such as John Dewey, Jurgen Habermas, and Benjamin Barber *(Dewey 1927/1991; Habermas 1990; Barber 1984)*. In contrast to participatory research and action research (see below), however, my feeling is that public scholarship generally emphasizes deliberation over participation. Public scholarship typically addresses issues of wide concern to the community, such as regional development, environmental health, and race relations, and as a result, public scholars typically employ forums that are open to the entire community. The field is especially concerned with situations in which the public good is not understood by aggregating preexisting interests but rather is created through processes of public deliberation. Dewey refers to such situations as "public" problems, in the sense that solutions can be generated only through collective knowledge and action *(Dewey 1991, 12–16)*. In political science, James Fishkin's method of deliberative polling has been providing vivid examples of how the public's understanding of its own interest can change in the course of deliberative practices in a way that falls out of aggregative conceptions of the public good *(Fishkin, Luskin, and Jowell 2000)*. Deliberative practices are showing that participants can gain a greater understanding of the complexity of public problems as they benefit from encounters with fellow citizens and professional scholars. At the same time, such practices can help scholars generate new research questions, verify hypotheses, and generalize conclusions as knowledge is produced in the course of deliberation. Although public scholarship is being incorporated into undergraduate teaching, its primary location is in research and application scholarship. Public scholarship is occurring in a variety of disciplines in the social sciences, the humanities, and the natural sciences. National organizations such as Study Circles Research Group and the Kettering Foundation's National Issues Forums are starting to institutionalize their methods through civic engagement centers on campuses around the country *(Mallory and Thomas 2003)*. Others are inventing their own methods. The Center for Democratic Planning and Participatory Research (formerly the Appalachian Center) at the University of Kentucky, for example, has been combining multimedia humanities scholarship with public forums to create informed discussion on issues

such as the impact of highway development on local communities *(Taylor 2003)*. Scholars in such fields as weed science and mutation research are using deliberative practices to generate research questions and gather data *(Jordan et al. 2002; Sullivan et al. 2003)*.

Second, very closely related to public scholarship is *participatory research* (also referred to as "action research" or "participatory action research"). Like public scholarship, participatory research stresses the active role citizens can play in the production of academic knowledge. The main difference I see between the two stems from the relative emphases on participation versus deliberation. While public scholars are more concerned with enhancing the quality of public participation in research, for participatory research the emphasis tends to be on promoting participation itself. Participatory research tends to respond to problems of exclusion by reaching out to a marginalized or previously excluded group. For example, one scholar in this tradition defines action research as "a process of research in which an oppressed group of people or a community identifies a problem, collects information, analyzes, and acts upon the problem in order to solve it and to promote public transformation" *(Mordock and Krasny 2001)*. Since the emphasis is on including a specific group in research to solve a specific problem, the deliberative methods of public scholarship such as open public forums on universal issues are less appropriate. Indeed, if the target audience is a small minority, deliberation with the general public may be seen as counterproductive or even oppressive, echoing the "activist" criticisms of deliberative democracy in contemporary political theory *(Young 2001)*. Nevertheless, despite their differences, public scholarship and participatory research often overlap and can supplement one another depending on the nature of the problem being addressed. For example, participatory research is the preferred terminology of the Center for Democratic Planning and Participatory Research, though they are also exploring overlaps with public scholarship *(Taylor 2003)*.

Third, the scholarship of engagement includes practices referred to as *community partnerships*. Public participation and deliberation may be key components of community partnership, but the primary emphasis in this field tends to be on social transformation. As a result, one might say that community partnerships are animated primarily by a conception of social democracy and are concerned with power, resources, and building social movements. Harry Boyte, a leader in community partnerships,

describes his practices as "public work" *(Boyte 2003)*. It is this focus on social transformation that distinguishes community partnerships from alternative conceptions of civic engagement. Ira Harkavy, a leader in this field, describes his work as a conscious effort at "going beyond service learning" by accomplishing structural transformation through comprehensive institutional commitments linked to teaching and research, a goal that is only sometimes explicitly stated in service-learning practices *(Harkavy 1996)*. While community partnerships often overlap with public scholarship and participatory research practices, the emphasis characteristic of this approach tends to be less on the quality of political processes and more on the result of social transformation. As a result, community partnerships do not have to operate through deliberative forums or other forms of direct contact with the public; instead, they typically engage scholars through contact with intermediary public entities such public agencies, local schools, activist groups, and community organizations. The Center for Community Partnerships at the University of Pennsylvania, directed by Harkavy, is a leading exemplar of this approach, as are many of the programs at the Center for Democracy and Citizenship at the University of Minnesota, directed by Boyte.

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Fourth, many scholarship of engagement centers are creating *public information networks*. These networks typically help communities identify resources and assets by providing comprehensive databases of local activists, advocacy groups, and available services. While not necessarily tied to a specific conception of democracy or public problem as are the other forms of engaged scholarship, public information networks still have a relatively specific focus compared to civic engagement broadly defined; even though they do not always stress iterative and deliberative qualities, they are exclusively concerned with public judgment and democratic discourse. Public information networks work best where resources to solve a problem already exist in a community but are not being utilized effectively due to a lack of organization or communication. Washington's Seattle Political

Table 1: A taxonomy based on five practices of engaged scholarship can be represented as follows:

Practice	Theory	Problems Addressed	Methods
Public scholarship	Deliberative	Complex "public" problems requiring deliberation	Face to face, open forums
Participatory research	Participatory democracy	Inclusion of specific groups	Face to face collaboration with specific publics
Community partnership	Social democracy	Social change, structural transformation	Collaboration with inter-mediary groups
Public information networks	Democracy broadly understood	Problems of networking, communication	Databases of public resources
Civic literacy scholarship	Democracy broadly understood	Enhancing public discourse	Communication with general public

Information Network, Minnesota's Community Information Corps, Kentucky's Common Knowledge Network, and the Democracy Collaborative's Information Commons are all examples of this approach.

A final approach to the scholarship of engagement emphasizes *civic skills* or *civic literacy*. Regardless of one's specific conception of democracy, any healthy democracy requires a minimal competence in knowledge of political institutions, economics, and science and technology to make educated and informed decisions. Through teaching, research, and outreach, engaged scholars in this field are helping to enhance democratic processes by ensuring that their disciplines are supplying publics with the knowledge necessary for reflective judgments on public issues. This approach again aims at deepening practices of engagement with the specific aim of reducing the separation between expert specialists and the lay public, as well as by its specific emphasis on skills that are relevant to political participation and democratic decision making. At the same time, civic literacy approaches differ from other forms of engaged scholarship by targeting relatively broad and long-term trends in general public knowledge rather than specific and immediate problems. Project Pericles of Macalester College is one exemplary service-learning program with a specific focus on

civic learning *(Latham 2003)*. It should also be noted that civic literacy scholarship is not limited to the social and political sciences; natural scientists too have been increasingly concerned to ensure that the public has an adequate understanding of science and technology so as to reach reflective judgments on those issues *(Lee and Roth 2003)*.[2]

Conclusion

While each of these five practices has its own distinctive methodology and underlying core conceptions of democracy, these methods are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, almost all of these practices overlap with one another, and indeed they are often practiced simultaneously by the same scholars and institutions. Engaged scholars identify with one of these practices over the others not to set up a universal a priori rule for the "best" method of engagement, but rather in response to their particular concerns and interests. In creating a practical taxonomy of engaged scholarship, it will thus be crucial to look for patterns in the types of public problems that are being addressed. All engaged scholarship addresses problems that are broadly "public" in nature, but some may be short term and particular, while others may contribute to the common good in broad or long-term ways. Engaged scholarship can emphasize the processes of democratic decision making, or the substantive results of social transformation. Aristotle remarked in his *Ethics* that "we must . . . not look for precision in all things alike, but in each class of things such precision as accords with the subject-matter, and so much as it is appropriate to the inquiry" *(Aristotle 1984, 1735)*. More recently, philosophers such as Dewey and Kuhn have embraced approaches to science and knowledge that, like that of Aristotle, are driven by the subject of inquiry rather than some universal a priori standard *(Dewey 1958; Kuhn 1970)*. The growing acceptance of a problem-driven approach to the epistemology and methodology of contemporary scholarship helps to explain the pluralism evident in the field of engaged scholarship. Taken together, these five practices of engaged scholarship make up an exciting mosaic that signifies a distinct movement in the American higher education community. Despite their differences, each practice aims to broaden the focus of civic engagement in higher education beyond teaching, to do so with the rigor and seriousness of traditional academic scholarship, and to cultivate deeper forms of civic engagement linked to specific problems in American democracy.

Appendix

Examples of recently established centers with a focus on the scholarship of engagement or the practices associated with engaged scholarship include:

- Center for the City, University of Missouri at Kansas City, Linda G. Taylor, Director.
- Center for Civic Engagement, University of Texas at El Paso, Kathleen Staudt, Director.
- Center for Communication and Civic Engagement, University of Washington, Lance Bennett, Director.
- Center for Community Partnerships, University of Pennsylvania, Ira Harkavy, Director.
- Center for Deliberative Polling, University of Texas, James Fishkin, Director.
- Center for Democracy and Citizenship, University of Minnesota, Harry Boyte, Director.
- Center for Democratic Planning and Participatory Research, University of Kentucky, Herbert Reid, Director.
- Democracy Collaborative, University of Maryland, Ted L. Howard, Executive Director
- New England Center for Civic Life, Franklin Pierce College, Joni Doherty, Director.
- Project Pericles, Macalester College, Andrew Latham and Karin Trail-Johnson, co-Directors.
- Pennsylvania Center for Civic Life, Lock Haven University, James T. Knauer, Director.
- Public Scholarship Associates, Penn State University, Jeremy Cohen, Director.
- Scripps Howard Center for Civic Engagement, Northern Kentucky University, Laurie DiPadova-Stocks, Director.

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Endnotes

1. The mainstream academic approach has recently been defended against calls for engaged scholarship *(Fish 2003)*.

2. Several reviews concentrate specifically on practices of civic engagement in natural science scholarship *(Peters, Jordan, and Lemme 1999; Robertson and Hull 2003; Backstrand 2002)*.

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