It's Time for a Second-Wave Movement

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One sunny July afternoon, as the story goes, a young man knocked on the front door of a majestic home located in the city's best neighborhood. The intent: to ask an important question.

The man of the house, an investment banker, had an inkling what this visit was about.

"Sir," the young man began slowly with voice trembling, "I'd like permission to marry your daughter."

Because the man didn't know a lot about his prospective son-in-law, now was the time to learn more.

"Tell me about yourself," the man asked. "What do you do for a living?"

"I'm a college student," the young man replied.

"So what are you studying and what will you do after graduating?" the man asked.

"I'm a theology major," the young man answered. "I'm not sure what I'll be doing, but I know one thing for sure: God will take care of things."

The man probed a bit more: "Have you thought about how you'll support our daughter?"

"Well…" the young man said—with a pause—"I'm ranked #1 in my class. I have a lot of motivation, too.

But, more than anything, I trust that God will take care of us."

Flummoxed by the responses, the man excused himself, saying he'd be back in a few minutes. He then searched for his wife, who was out in the yard.

"How's it going?" she asked with interest.

With lips pursed, the man shook his head back and forth slowly.

"Well, dear… he's a student. He doesn't have a job. He doesn't have a career plan. And he thinks I'm God." *(adapted from a story told by Rev. John F. Deary, Order of St. Augustine)*

*T*he punch line, of course, makes this story. The narrative isn't about a young man's faith in God, as we're led to believe; it's about the parents, wealthy parents at that, concerned about their daughter's welfare and their prospective role. The father's frame of reference is completely understandable, given circumstance and context.

Many experiences in life are like that. We follow a storyline only to learn that there isn't a single narrative after all. If only we had foresight—an early-on view that reveals things as they are, not just how they seem to be.

Circumstance and Context in Outreach-Engagement

This story and its interpretation illustrate our take on the outreach and engagement movement, especially on the way it has evolved over the decades. To better understand that comparison, let's start by analyzing two words referenced in the interpretation of our opening story: *circumstance* and *context.*

The treatment of circumstance will introduce you to who we are and why outreach-engagement is important to us. The treatment of context is important for two reasons: to comment about the time, 15 years ago, when we wrote the *JHEOE* article, and to describe what we were doing at that time in our respective careers.

Circumstance

We began working together in the early 1990s as faculty members at Michigan State University (MSU). We found ourselves in the vanguard of a national movement largely because outreach, and later engagement, was an institutional priority at MSU. We played lead roles in a university-wide planning effort, working with a talented group of MSU faculty members and administrators selected by MSU's provost. That work was nested in an assemblage of strategic initiatives that addressed a range of domains, including undergraduate education *(CRUE, 1988)*, graduate education *(CORRAGE, 1990)*, institutional diversity and pluralism *(MSU IDEA Records, 1991–2002)*, and university athletics *(Spartan Athletic Review Committee Records, 1991)*.

Our challenge was to propose a scholarly-based approach to institutional outreach and engagement and then connect that conceptualization to an institutional development strategy. We studied. We engaged in dialogue. We planned. We wrote. By the mid-1990s, our work culminated in the publication of two institutional reports: a broad-based framing document (*Provost's Committee on University Outreach, 1993/2009*, committee chaired by Fear with Sandmann as committee member) and an essay on evaluating outreach-engagement quality *(Committee on Evaluating Quality Outreach, 1996*, committee cochaired by Sandmann with Fear as committee member).

Context

We wrote the *JHEOE* article in 2001, when the outreach-engagement movement was about a decade old. And we wrote it with 5+ years of practical experience under our belts. That experience included operationalizing ideas we had developed during our time at MSU. We felt it was time to make this work real, and that's exactly what we tried to do at MSU and other universities.

There's a second dimension to understanding context. In addition to being immersed in the work, we were also observers of the unfolding movement, keen to learn what was happening around the country. With that in mind, and starting in the late 1990s, a good share of our writing (together and independently) was done as *commentary*. Our jointly authored 2001 *JHEOE* article is just that—commentary—written as *participants in* and *observers of* outreach and engagement.

What We Wrote in 2001

So what did we say back then? If we had to reduce the answer to one word, it would be "*Really?*" From the beginning of our work together, we were committed to seeing through the vision articulated by Ernest Boyer in his groundbreaking work (e.g., *Scholarship Reconsidered [1990]* and *The Scholarship of Engagement [1996]*). By 2000, however, we were concerned about "slippage." The movement needed recalibrating, we asserted, if Boyer's vision was to be achieved.

We read extensively to deepen our understanding of dynamics we had witnessed. No piece of literature better served that purpose than Donald Schön's *(1995)* article "The New Scholarship Requires a New Epistemology." Accordingly, we built our assessment and cued our argument around the ideas presented in Schön's paper.

What was Schön's core argument? He declared that "the new scholarship"—a primary tenet in Boyer's formulation—required a new epistemology, that is, a different and alternative way of knowing. The conventional epistemology, which Schön labeled *technical rationality*, is the conventional way of knowing, perhaps best exemplified by the work associated with "bench science." It was a privileged epistemology, Schön continued, the gold standard in academe. But other ways of knowing are valuable, too, he argued, particularly those associated with cocreating knowledge, the act that's fundamental to many forms of engagement practice.

Schön also wrote that technical rationality is the prevailing *institutional* epistemology. Colleges and universities operate as highly structured, authority-based, and rule-bound institutions. That protocol doesn't align with the norms that distinguish engagement work: collaboration, mutuality, community, and mutual concern.

Schön's words gave us language, and he fueled our intent to write. That resolve heightened when we read the work of others, such as Daniel Yankelovich, who endorsed and amplified Schön's critique. Regarding technical rationality, Yankelovich *(1999)* wrote:

> For purposes of gaining control over people and things, the knowledge of technical and scientific experts has proven superior to other ways of knowing. But for the truths of human experience—learning how to live— that form of knowledge is awkward, heavy-handed, and unresponsive. It fails to address the great questions of how to live, what values to pursue, what meaning to find

in life, how to achieve a just and human world, and how to be a fully realized human person. *(p. 197)*

Yankelovich's words resonated with us. We were concerned about the movement's trajectory. We were frustrated, too. We couldn't understand why more people around the country weren't speaking up. We wrote the article to communicate our concerns.

"*Yes, but…*" Our article began with a series of "Yes, but…" assertions:

> Boyer's… provocative way of thinking about the scholarly life… can't be fully captured by simply affirming a diverse range of work as scholarly. *(p. 30)*

> [Boyer's work] doesn't seem complete… by exchanging learning for teaching, discovery for research, and engagement for service. *(p. 30)*

> Technical rationality, the waters in which we have swum for years, is too tranquil for what Boyer has expressed. *(p. 31)*

> If we interpret and advance the new scholarship, including engagement, through technically rational eyes, we will likely constrain its reach. We'll likely bring it to the level of everydayness, taking limited steps and declaring them to be "new." *(p. 32)*

> The alternative is permitting ourselves to think extraordinary thoughts and then to engage in extraordinary practices—to be swept to a new place, a new way of being, and a new way of engaging. Isn't that what transformation means? *(pp. 32–33)*

"*Wait a minute!*" We then took aim at Extension. In a trend that was understandable in some ways but concerning in other ways, we often saw Extension "right sizing" engagement so that it fit comfortably in prevailing ways of thinking and practicing. "Wait a minute!" is one way of categorizing the section of our article titled "Implications for Extension."

- Don't just "hitch up" to the wagon of scholarship. *(p. 35)*

- Don't reduce scholarship to the way Extension work is organized, presented, and evaluated. *(p. 35)*

- Recognize that the new scholarship challenges conventional ways of doing business. *(p. 36)*

- Remember that scholarship is not just "about doing." It's also about critique. *(p. 36)*

- Remember that achieving ends and goals, although important, is insufficient. Values are important, too. *(p. 36)*

- Remember that the new scholarship is about taking stands. Engagement with whom? Engagement for what? *(p. 37)*

After drafting the article, we took a step back to evaluate what we had written. We were uber-assertive, preachy at times, and declarative from beginning to end. We had questions: Would readers feel criticized? Were we—self-identified "engaged scholars"—biting the hand that feeds us? Were our voices too shrill?

In the end, we decided to modify tone while maintaining intent. Our stance came through clearly and undeniably at the end:

> Over time we have felt underwhelmed by higher education's response. It's not so much that higher education has failed to "come to the table and engage." It was more the ways in which higher education has sought to engage and how it often goes about the change process. *(p. 38)*

Expressing What, Not Why

Is that conclusion an indictment of the movement? There were times, back then, when our answer might have been yes; but we wouldn't settle there today. Why? The answer is tied, in part, to what we didn't include in our 2001 essay. Although we were able to comment extensively on *what*, our understanding back then hadn't progressed sufficiently to offer much about *why*.

One reason is restricted sightline: We focused on one movement, outreach-engagement, in one sector, higher education. With time and reflection it became clear to us that a fundamental dynamic is relevant across fields and sectors. It's the matter of when,

why, and how systems change, including how a basic question is answered: *Change for what?*

Our answer was that the movement would change the essence of higher education. Visionaries like Boyer had promised as much. But what we saw happening was a different form of change. Sandmann *(2008)* wrote about it in a *JHEOE* article on the evolution and state of the field, 1996-2006—the status of which she described as "a multifaceted field of responses."

Her choice of wording—*field*—is important. That, we believe, is the movement's greatest triumph: Outreach-engagement, which has evolved as a respected academic field, now occupies a seat at the academic table. Previously, this work had often been located at the institutional margins, its practitioners marginalized, even demeaned, as "inferior" and "not academic." Today, that picture has changed: Outreach-engagement is a dynamic and evolving field of scholarship and practice that carries ever-increasing academic respect.

But lagging behind, generally, is the yeastiness of "the promise"; that is, that colleges and universities would change dramatically in philosophy, posture, and form—the promise Boyer *(1994)* portrayed so elegantly in his widely read *Chronicle of Higher Education* essay "Creating the New American College." Why was one path pursued above the other? One answer is that we know how to elevate academic work so that it passes peer-evaluated muster. But there's at least one other reason, too: politics.

Around the time we released our first MSU report in 1993, there were rumblings of concern from some of MSU's senior research-focused faculty. An article appeared in the local Gannett newspaper, *The Lansing State Journal*, quoting a number of prominent faculty who feared the university might be deemphasizing research, displacing it with outreach.

Not long before that, Fear had an odd, but instructive, experience. Dressed in academic garb, he was waiting in line for an academic procession to begin. A senior university administrator came up from behind and tugged at his robe: "Will it be cross-cutting or overarching?" was the question. "Cross-cutting," Fear replied.

What was the question? *Will your committee recommend positioning outreach-engagement as cross-cutting the academic mission of teaching, research, and service? Or will the committee propose it as an overarching university function?* Fear's answer—cross-cutting—was a response communicated with pride. It was a distinguishing

feature of the work undertaken at MSU. Here's how we described it in our 2001 *JHEOE* paper:

> Engagement [is] a connective expression. That happens when we replace the preposition "of" (the scholarship of engagement) with the preposition "in" [scholarship *in* engagement]. When we do that, engagement becomes a cross-cutting phenomenon—engagement in teaching, in research, and in service—guided by an engagement ethos. *(p. 35)*

When the work is represented as an integrative phenomenon, outreach-engagement can be digested into preexisting scholarly conceptions and incorporated in existing university functions. Neither is the case with engagement-as-overarching. That conceptualization is radical, a new and different way of thinking and operating—and a threat to business as usual.

In hindsight, it's easy to identify the limitations associated with conceiving outreach-engagement as we did. Here's why: By portraying outreach-engagement as a form of scholarship that crosscuts the academic mission, we made it easier for the work to be integrated and infused into the academy's framework. However, in doing so, we offered a means to reform the system, not to transform it. Indeed, the MSU provost who had commissioned our study said as much: "It's not bold enough." Back then, we had no idea what he meant or even why he would have said that.

Today we do. We continue to believe that Schön "had it right"— that the new scholarship needs a new epistemology—but we also know today that the time to have pushed hard in that direction was in the early-to-mid-1990s, when the movement was being framed and focused. We didn't do that. And, furthermore, we didn't have a clue (then) that it was an opportunity lost.

Understanding How Systems Change: Implications for Outreach-Engagement

In intellectual terms, how might we explain why this happened? For an answer, we reference a book that was written over 45 years ago, Thomas Kuhn's *(1970)* rendition on paradigm shifts, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. The book explains how systems work, why and how they change, and in what direction they change.

Systems, Kuhn observes, have a penchant for self-preservation. But circumstances change over time, and it's not possible

for any system to meet all challenges, all circumstances, forever. "Anomalies of fact" emerge—troubling and fractious inconsistencies—that can't be addressed or managed easily, if at all. The continuing viability of a system is connected to its self-correcting capacity—that is, its ability to acknowledge challenges and find ways to change accordingly.

How does this interpretation apply to outreach-engagement? At the time, it was argued that universities had become detached and uninterested in the public sphere. They tended to be self-absorbed, overly focused on esoteric and disciplinary matters. Although it was a stinging critique, the criticism was hardly new. And it might not have led to change if it were not for circumstance and context: The time was right for the critique to "stick."

For one thing, powerful institutions spoke in favor of, and encouraged, change, including two influential foundations, the Carnegie Foundation and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. The nascent movement also had an influential voice, a spokesperson: Ernest Boyer, who wrote expressively, passionately, and substantively about "the problem" and how it might be addressed. Higher education, he wrote, needed to change, and that change had a name: *engagement*.

With both circumstances in place, a number of university presidents, chancellors, provosts, deans, and others jumped on board. Scholar-practitioners affiliated with a variety of fields (e.g., Extension, lifelong education, community development, service-learning) joined in. *Voila!* A movement was born.

But this is where Kuhn's work is patently instructive. Will the movement transform the system? Or will it enable the system to autocorrect? We think the record is clear: Outreach-engagement hasn't transformed America's universities and colleges. Rather, the work has been digested into the system, evaluated using standard academic and institutional metrics. It's a notable accomplishment, too. Those involved in the movement—administrators and faculty members alike—"upped their game" over the years, delivering on the field's academic potential.

Outreach-Engagement as Transformative Force: The Movement's Second Wave

With that success achieved, it's time for a second-wave movement. Higher education needs outreach-engagement as a transformative force. Why? Higher education is still inward-looking today,

but it's a different kind of "inward" from before, more onerous and problematic for society. Let's analyze two reasons why.

First, the Boyer-infused critique of years ago—the "tyranny of the disciplines" critique—was a progressive stance. The critique was grounded in self-appraisal and led to an outward-looking conclusion: Higher education needs to do more to serve society and serve it better. There's much to be said and applauded about that posture. But the situation today is quite different. Higher education institutions devote an enormous amount of attention and resources to advancing their own interests. Every school seems to have "a brand," and institutions compete against one another on just about everything, including students, faculty, grants, and donations. Put plainly: Matters of institutional self-interest and advancement dominate higher education's leadership and administrative agenda.

Second, the Boyer-stimulated movement was predominantly conceived and led from *within* higher education and related institutions (e.g., foundations). The public did not call for change, and the public was generally uninvolved in the movement's design and execution. Today, however, calls for change in higher education are coming from *outside the academy*—in fact, from public stakeholders. Why? The public is being affected directly and negatively.

> Tuition has increased over 1200% over the past 30 years. Aggregate student debt has surpassed $1 trillion… nationally. And, day after day, news headlines call attention to an array of issues, such as campus sexual assaults, racist and sexualized fraternities, outsized college athletics, administrative bloat, and unfair treatment of part-time and adjunct teaching faculty. Circumstances have led to activism, government intervention, and plain old head-shaking. *(Fear, 2015, para. 4)*

Higher education's response? Defensiveness. Limited introspection. Motor ahead with business as usual. The outcome: The progressive stance of the late 1980s has been replaced by a neoliberal stance of the 2000s. By neoliberalism, we mean contouring the higher education space in a profoundly businesslike manner, so that institutions are able to compete more effectively with peer institutions in a market-dominated system. For example:

> There is increased emphasis on garnering grant awards by faculty members across all disciplines, along with an associated emphasis on productivity metrics and

rankings that reward faculty for maintaining funding streams. The growing emphasis on big-budget initiatives that serve corporate interests has been matched by a de-emphasis on research and outreach activities that serve general knowledge or "only" the local public good. Increasingly, funding for research comes less from public sources and more from the private sector, raising numerous ethical challenges in the production of knowledge. *(Martinez, Beecher, & Gasteyer, 2015, para. 5)*

What does this mean? We believe that a neoliberal-dominated approach can't be sustained; it subverts the purposes of higher education, particularly public higher education. With that in mind, we believe the system will burst. Why? The anomalies of fact that higher education faces today are many in number, variety, magnitude, and depth. And the issues aren't "higher education's little secret," either. Many issues are well within public view, including the callous and self-serving way that higher education sometimes operates (e.g., handling campus sexual assaults).

We believe trauma in the system is too severe for modest change. Bold action will be required. The system is in crisis. Overhaul is needed.

Soon, we believe, we'll get a second chance at change—bold change. The current motif—what's best for the institution—will shift to an emphasis on what's best for the public. Outreach and engagement is higher education's best chance for change that fundamentally serves the public good.

What might that mean? In the second-wave movement, "making knowledge more accessible"—a refrain heard frequently in the early phases of the prior movement—won't be a rallying cry because it's mute with regard to these questions: What knowledge? For whom? With what purpose? Besides, the statement declares that "we" (in the academy) generate knowledge that we then share. That's a restrictive way of thinking about how knowledge is created.

In the second-wave movement we won't contend (as we did before) *that the academy is underengaged* because we will have recognized that the academy has always been engaged—sometimes overengaged and for private gain. There is nothing value-neutral about choices we make in outreach-engagement, including what work we do, with whom we do it, and for what purposes.

In the second-wave movement, outreach-engagement *won't be understood primarily in process terms (how partners relate to each*

other). Process will be trumped by intent—to engage for the public's good, especially to advance life conditions of persons often left behind. The truly big problems of the world, including poverty and climate change, afflict certain populations more than others.

In the second-wave movement, *outreach-engagement won't be something we do just off-campus*. Colleges and universities will be engaged environments, too, different from the administratively-driven places they are today. To do otherwise will be viewed as hypocritical. We'll be held accountable for practicing what we preach.

In the second-wave movement, *outreach-engagement won't be simply integrated into scholarship as it's understood and practiced conventionally*. Alternative forms will be acknowledged and pursued, accepted and endorsed. "Big science" has its place, but more space needs to be made for determining who qualifies as a scholar and what qualifies as scholarship. Major life issues, the ones Yankelovich described in his response to Schön, won't be marginalized.

And in the second-wave movement, *students won't look to service-learning and engaged learning as "resume boosters" to impress prospective employers*. They will participate because they want to make the world a better place—by connecting what they're learning with the goal of improving others' lives.

All of these, and many other things, will happen during a second wave of the movement. It will be a time when people will say, "Yes, this changes everything!"

And the *this* will be outreach-engagement.

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