

Community Engagement: A Natural Evolution of Higher Education's Traditional Missions of Service

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Lorilee R. Sandmann, Courtney H. Thornton, and Audrey J. Jaeger (Eds.), *Institutionalizing Community Engagement in Higher Education: The First Wave of Carnegie Classified Institutions: New Directions for Higher Education, Number 147*. San Francisco: Josey-Bass, 2009, 112 pages. ISSN 0271-0560, electronic ISSN 1536-0741

Institutionalizing Community Engagement in Higher Education: The First Wave of Carnegie Classified Institutions identifies a renewed purpose for higher education at the turn of the 21st century. The editors explain that, as the century opened, U.S. colleges and universities “increasingly turned to community engagement as a natural evolution of their traditional missions of service to recognize ties to their communities along with their commitments to the social contract between society and higher education” (p. 1). Community Engagement provides an essential foundation and institutional framework for universities and colleges to both define and measure their impact as change agents, not merely analyzing, but intentionally seeking to affect, social change in the 21st century.

It is in this context that a new classification for Community Engagement was extended through the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. The elective (voluntary) classification was first offered in 2006 (and again in 2008 and 2010; the most recent invitation to participate was extended in 2015).¹ This unique classification involves data collection and documentation of relevant aspects of an individual university's mission, identity, and commitments to community engagement. Although participation requires substantial effort (it is not a task to be taken lightly), the elective classification is not an award; rather, it is an evidence-based documentation of institutional practice to be used to assess the university's role—and higher education's role—in affecting community. The Carnegie classification is part of a larger call, in other words, that puts the onus on institutions of higher learning to contribute to the public good.²

Institutionalizing Community Engagement comprises 10 chapters, each of which contributes to a better understanding of the then-new classification by addressing different qualities and challenges that surface in the applications submitted by institutions that earned the inaugural elective classification. The overall effect is to identify correlations, offer insights, and reflect on long-term and

prospective transformation.

Setting the context for the exchange, Chapter 1, “Carnegie's New Community Engagement Classification: Affirming Higher Education's Role in Community” provides an overview of the history and origins of the classification itself. A. Driscoll highlights the intentional emphasis in the Carnegie framework, as well as the focus on community engagement as curricular engagement, outreach and partnerships, or both (as was the case for the first wave of classifications). In her purview of the various campuses, Driscoll identifies common areas yet to be explored—including assessment, promotion and tenure policies, and communication and collaboration with community (p. 9-11). Many of these same issues continue to be identified as gaps for further research and development—and thus it is of little surprise that fellow contributors to the monograph address each of these challenges in more detail.³ To the authors' credit (and presumed satisfaction), significant work has been done since 2009 to address various aspects of these challenges.

Assessment is especially tricky. In A. Driscoll's survey of institutions, she found that assessment of community engagement was “in dire need of development. Even the simple tracking and recording of engagement activities,” she acknowledges,

¹ The framework has changed since the inaugural wave of Carnegie classified institutions. Beginning with the 2010 classification, campuses needed to provide evidence in both Curricular Engagement and Outreach and Partnerships in order to be classified. In 2006 and 2008, however, campuses could choose to be classified in one area or in both. For a listing of 2010 and 2015 community engagement classified institutions, see http://nerche.org/images/stories/projects/Carnegie/2015/2010_and_2015_CE_Classified_Institutions_revised_1_11_15.pdf.

² Two publications are worth noting because, as is the case with the collective essays under review here, both are reports that result from collaborative efforts to identify “best practices” in responding to the call to contribute to the public good through community engagement. Kellogg Foundation (2002) and National Center for the Public Policy and Higher Education (2008).

³ Indeed, in the concluding chapter, the editors return to areas that were and continue to be identified as challenging, including the authenticity and reciprocity in community partnerships and validating and documenting such partnerships for the benefit of faculty rewards; a revisit to and revision of (in some cases) the language of engagement; and—not surprisingly—assessment.

“appeared to be difficult to maintain with a systematic institution-wide process” (p. 10). A. Furco and W. Miller dig deeper into the challenges of assessment in Chapter 5, “Issues in Benchmarking and Assessing Institutional Engagement.” In their survey of the first wave of classified institutions, the authors discover that the tools of assessment vary widely by institution. Regardless of the approach used to conduct an assessment, the process of assessment is invaluable in setting the university on the right path toward the development of institutional goals and strategic plans for community engagement. Furco and Miller observe that, “Assessment must be coupled with action planning, whereby the information garnered from the assessment is used strategically to make decision that can advance community engagement at the institution” (p. 53).

Part of the problem is that institutional impact can be experienced internally, as well as in community. The characteristics and choices of institutional leaders; the role of advancement and other offices such as extended learning, in providing the necessary resources; and the ways in which organization theory can help to maximize institutional understandings are three areas addressed by respective contributors to the volume. For example, in Chapter 2, “Leading the Engaged Institution,” the authors assert that advancing engagement requires staying on message as well as setting institutional direction through strategic planning and employee evaluation processes, for example. A wide variety of organizational structures exist to promote community engagement in higher education; no single structure seems to be better than another. However, Sandmann and Plater assert that leaders who are personally committed to the values inherent in a community-engaged university are far more likely to steer their institutions authentically toward that mission. Personal mission is as important, if not more important, than dominant, executive leadership of the university mission. “By engaging themselves, leaders engage their whole institution” (p. 15). Moreover, effective leadership cuts across the campus, not top-down. “Truly engaged universities have leaders in many roles, all of whom can interact with a shared commitment because they are also personal commitments” (p. 23).

The role of campus leadership in defining an “engagement culture” and an “engagement brand” is emphasized in other contributions to the volume as well. Citing supporting research, C.H. Thornton and J.J. Zuiches observe that institutional culture plays a significant role in a university’s commit-

ment to public service and engagement, as well as in garnering the commitment of its organizational members.(Chapter 8, “After the Engagement Classification: Using Organization Theory to Maximize Institutional Understandings). In “Engagement and Institutional Advancement” (Chapter 7), D. Weerts and E. Hudson assert that by redefining institutional organization (and organizational culture) through a lens that considers the “bigger picture,” traditional university advancement practices are being reconsidered in light of the new emphasis on community engagement. The “engagement brand,” they argue, has been leveraged to increase both private philanthropic and public legislative and state funding. In their survey of the Carnegie institutions, they found that internal financial commitment was matched by fundraising and marketing efforts. Weerts and Hudson reiterate that campus leadership—and campus presidents, in particular—may be “the most important marketing tools to shape the civic identities” of their respective institutions. Presidential communication, they argue, “is critical to reinforce the engagement brand” (p. 72). Weerts and Hudson conclude that the prospective benefits of collaboration between leaders of community engagement and the advancement offices on their respective campuses are “enormous.” Whether this relationship is as potentially fruitful as the authors suggest, they demonstrate that the Carnegie classification has played an undeniable role in helping institutions of higher education assess institutional impact across the campus.

But even when institutions demonstrate institutional commitment, what is engagement without community? “Creating a productive, healthy, and sustainable partnership is hard work and time-consuming,” asserts C. Beere, who sets out to discover the results of partnership-related data. In “Understanding and Enhancing the Opportunities of Community-Campus Partnerships” (Chapter 6), Beere describes the fact that partnerships vary widely, and that in the first wave of Carnegie classified institutions, these partnerships were affected by the university’s history, size, mission, and overall nature; areas of expertise; and demographics of the neighborhood. With respect to best practices, Beere observes that genuine partnerships begin in community. “In determining which partnerships to establish or embrace, campuses should consider the significance of the problem that will be addressed and the resources and commitment needed to make a meaningful impact” (p. 61).

With respect to community partners, Beere’s

recommendations are slightly less salient. She suggests that the university's focus on generating knowledge implies that the partner should be "open to accommodating such interest and participation in work alongside campus partners to establish action or engaged research agendas" (p. 62). Increasingly, leaders in community engagement celebrate the recognition that genuinely mutually reciprocal campus-partner relationships involve the shared, co-generation of knowledge: Knowledge originating in community is seen as equally valid (if not valued) as that generated in the academic institution.

This point is echoed in "Rewarding Community-Engaged Scholarship" (J. Saltmarsh, D.E. Giles, Jr., E. Ward and S.M. Buglione). The authors focus on the extent to which engaged universities embed values of community engagement in the institutional reward policies that define faculty roles of teaching, scholarship, and service. Serving as the foundation is the reconceptualization of scholarship to include the scholarship of engagement, which is based on reciprocity and genuine collaboration with community. Essential to best practices is a concrete definition of engaged scholarship; a more integrated conception of scholarship across faculty roles of research, teaching and service; a clear prioritizing of reciprocal campus-community relationships; and a reconsideration of "publication" and who is considered a "peer" in the peer review process (p. 34). The faculty rewards system continues to be an issue of utmost concern among Carnegie classified institutions, but as the authors assert, it is a process that demands a culture of engagement—in genuine collaboration with community.

A shift toward "engagement culture" is more likely to be realized as engagement is implemented more widely across higher education, according to B. Holland in "Will it Last? Evidence of Institutionalization at Carnegie Classified Community Engagement Institutions" (Chapter 9). Holland makes the case that community engagement inherently involves others outside academia; the result is that higher education must inevitably "develop new skills and capacities of collaboration and cooperation..." (p. 97). In other words, the process of institutionalizing university-community engagement is in itself leading to cultural and organizational change.

R.G. Bringle and J.A. Hatcher assert that curricular engagement, such as service learning, correlates with a community-engaged university in "Innovative Practices in Service-Learning and Curricular Engagement" (Chapter 4). Acknowledging

that many manifestations of civic and community engagement exist, the authors observe that service learning classes are "core components as campuses progress beyond traditional models of engagement...[to] develop broader and deeper impact across the campus and within communities" (p. 37).

With the exception of Chapter 4, on service learning, overall the editors give little attention to discussion of democratic engagement and civic learning as core components of a Carnegie-engaged institution. Yet, democracy is central to community engagement. In the first part of the last century, Dewey (1916) asserted that the core mission of the university is civic engagement. Although the inaugural wave of institutions may not have demonstrated the relationship, contemporary literature seems to suggest that subsequent Carnegie classified institutions are indeed likely to be more explicit in their emphasis on and assessment of the university's civic responsibility (Ramaley, 2000).

The essays in this volume raise as many questions as they answer. To their credit, the editors and authors of *Institutionalizing Community Engagement* make no false claims: The collection does not pretend to serve as a "how to" guide; rather, as the editors acknowledge in the concluding chapter, the analyses are "only the first step required on the path of recognizing and defining the meaningful and useful best practices [of community engagement] that many desire to know" (p. 100). As each of the essays makes clear, there's still plenty of work to do! The editors conclude: "What is fairly unknown about the engagement efforts described by classified institutions is who is benefiting the most and the least, whether these engaged efforts are the most efficient way to address community issues and concerns, and whether these efforts are leading to sustained community change" (p. 101).

This collection of essays is invaluable for any institution of higher learning that is either toying with or seriously considering participating in the Carnegie elective classification. Indeed, the essays are equally relevant for any institution of higher learning that is making a new (or renewed) commitment to community engagement, quite apart from the Carnegie classification. Readers eagerly look forward to a successive and updated collection in the series to learn more about the subsequent waves of Carnegie Classified institutions, and the many ways higher education is responding to the call to contribute to the public good and demonstrating a commitment to affect community change in impactful and sustained ways.

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