

For Higher Ed, the *Crucible Moment* Has Arrived



In addressing the social, civic, ethical, and moral challenges of society, higher education has a long history of fluctuation in the United States. Many North American research universities originated with a goal of preparing students to possess a sense of civic responsibility and contribute to democratic society in a positive way. Most of us who work in the engaged scholarship arena are familiar with Ernest Boyer (1991, 1996), who is often credited with refocusing attention on higher ed's civic engagement mission. Since this refocusing, there have been varying degrees of exploration, attention, and resources allocated to community engagement by institutions of higher education, as well as a focus on how those who work within this context should be rewarded by their institutions.

Recently, *A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy's Future* was submitted to the U.S. Department of Education by the Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement National Task Force Association of American Colleges and Universities (2012). This report has the potential to be another seminal piece in the engagement scholarship arena. Although a complete critique of the report is beyond the scope of this opinion piece, there are highlights worth sharing that might motivate readers who have not read the report to seek it out and engage in a critical and reflective analysis of it. The complete report may be accessed at <http://www.aacu.org>. Referred to as a 21st century call to action for higher education to provide leaders with the knowledge, skills, motivation, and values needed to be active participants in shaping the world through the democratic process, the report addresses many of the obstacles to making education, especially higher education, relevant to current challenges. More than just a specialized presentation of the need for such an approach to education, the report provides evidence of the "anemic state of U.S. civic health" (p. 6). Another strength of the report is its provision of components of civic learning and democratic engagement in the areas of knowledge, skills, values, and collective action.

Of course, as would be expected, there are criticisms of the report. A primary criticism questions the role of government in implementation of this action approach in the higher education system (Finn, 2012). My experience is that many in the field of engagement scholarship and civic education have not read the report or are not aware of it. I encourage you to examine this report and share it with others interested in community engagement and higher education.

The current issue of *JCES* includes manuscripts that speak to many of the ideas and points raised in *A Crucible Moment* through various approaches. In this issue you will find manuscripts that speak to how university resources and partnerships can be used to assist rural communities in meeting their needs by bringing interdisciplinary groups together and building on their strengths to overcome the many challenges faced by these communities. Other manuscripts address diversity within the context of service-learning and how the process of deliberative polling can influence both individual and group attitudes. Our commitment to bring attention to the role of engagement scholarship within the reward system at institutions of higher learning is reflected in a manuscript that examines how publicly engaged scholarship varies within disciplines by intensity of activity and degree of engagement along various dimensions. In addition, another manuscript provides a useful checklist for evaluating service-learning as an instructional strategy. There are more articles that we could mention, but we will trust you to seek them out. We are pleased to include in this issue a piece by two students who worked with local communities in response to the devastating tornadoes that affected many of us directly tied to *JCES* on April 27, 2011.

Finally, we are excited about hosting NOSC 2012, September 30–October 3, with the theme of **Partner. Inspire. Change.** We encourage you to submit your proposals (<http://nosc2012.ua.edu/proposals.html>), and look forward to providing you with a meaningful, enlightening, and educational conference experience. Texas Tech will host the conference in 2013 under the new conference name, Engagement Scholarship Consortium, (<http://www.outreachscholarship.org/>).

References

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