

Community-Engaged Scholarship: Critical Junctures in Research, Practice, and Policy

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Abstract

Community-engaged scholarship and community-academic partnerships are gaining momentum in higher education institutions. Federal research funding agencies in Canada have moved aggressively toward increasing support for community-engaged research and knowledge mobilization efforts. Yet there is a well-articulated disjuncture between calls for social relevance, knowledge translation and mobilization, community-based research, service-learning, and engagement more broadly; and the resources, structures, and policies in Canadian universities. In November 2010, the University of Guelph and Community-Campus Partnerships for Health convened national and international leaders from diverse organizational and disciplinary backgrounds to consider what is known about community-engaged scholarship in higher education and its implications for future research, practice, and policy. Participants identified conceptual challenges, values and tensions, opportunities for action, and resources to support community-engaged scholarship.

Introduction

Community-engaged scholarship and community-academic partnerships are gaining momentum in higher education institutions. Federal research funding agencies in Canada have moved aggressively toward increasing support for community-engaged research and knowledge mobilization efforts (*Office of Community-Based Research, University of Victoria & Community-Based Research Canada, 2009*). Yet there is a well-articulated disjuncture between calls for social relevance, knowledge translation and mobilization, community-based research, service-learning, and engagement more broadly; and the resources, structures, and policies in Canadian universities (*Jackson, Schwartz, & Andree, 2008; Wenger, Hawkins, & Seifer, 2011*).

Stepping boldly into this challenging arena, in November 2010 the University of Guelph and Community-Campus Partnerships for Health convened national and international leaders from diverse organizational and disciplinary backgrounds to consider what is known about community-engaged scholarship in higher education

and its implications for future research, practice, and policy. Their co-sponsored conference, “Critical Junctures in Research, Practice, and Policy,” brought together 72 participants based in academic institutions, community organizations, and government agencies within Canada, the United States, and Australia. Drawing on their experiences as community-engaged scholars, scholars of community engagement, academic administrators, teachers, graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, directors and staff of community organizations, and knowledge mobilizers, participants contributed to the group’s collective learning through their involvement as presenters, moderators, and discussants.

**University of Guelph, Community-Campus
Partnerships for Health, and the Social Sciences
and Humanities Research Council of Canada
Conference, Community-Engaged Scholarship:
Critical Junctures in Research, Practice,
and Policy**

As part of the community-engaged scholarship theme issue of *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*, this article presents lessons learned from the conference, and is followed by two articles based on panel presentations at the conference.

Conference Objectives

In working to identify gaps in existing knowledge, clarify key challenges, and develop strategies to foster new multi-disciplinary networks and research partnerships, the conference was driven by four objectives:

1. To provide a forum for communicating current research on university policies and practices around community-engaged scholarship from national and international perspectives, specifically focusing on institutional structures and processes, faculty development programs, and faculty promotion and tenure policies;
2. To create an opportunity for discussing the implications of this research for the design of institutional structures, faculty development programs, and faculty promotion and tenure policies in the Canadian context;

3. To foster the development of research collaborations to further the study of community-engaged scholarship in Canadian higher education; and
4. To generate greater awareness, understanding, and visibility of community engagement challenges and strategies among key stakeholders in order to catalyze institutional change within the academy.

Building on this foundation, conference sessions were designed to mobilize the knowledge shared by participants as well as to facilitate changes in policies and practices persistently raised as significant barriers to community-engaged scholarship.

Conference Presentations

Participants were welcomed to the conference by Kerry Daly, dean of the College of Social and Applied Human Sciences, and Maureen Mancuso, provost and vice-president academic, both from the University of Guelph, who emphasized the need for boldness, risk, and comprehensive and systemic shifts within academic institutions to enable the practice, recognition, and reward of community-engaged scholarship. Sarena D. Seifer, Community-Campus Partnerships for Health executive director, outlined lessons learned from the organization's initiatives around institutional change in the United States.

The conference was structured around four themes relevant to catalyzing institutional change:

1. Advances in community-engaged scholarship
2. The development of community-engaged scholars
3. Structures and policies that support community-engaged scholarship
4. Strategies for institutional change

Conference highlights for each theme are presented below.

Advances in community-engaged scholarship.

Sherril Gelmon, professor of public health, Portland State University, offered participants a summary of over 15 years of work on community-engaged scholarship, identified seminal reports, and discussed the forms and dimensions of community-engaged scholarship, emerging issues, and promising practices (Gelmon, 2010). Gelmon presented a rationale for both “top down” and

“bottom up” approaches to the institutional changes needed to fully support community-engaged scholarship and provided a snapshot of community-engaged scholarship underway in Canadian universities, citing specific examples of campus initiatives, partnerships, centers, and task forces.

The development of community-engaged scholars.

Discussant Lynn Blanchard, director, Carolina Center for Public Service, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, detailed the challenges in developing community engagement scholars and the opportunities offered through competency-based models of community-engaged scholarship faculty development. Describing the process and impact of a charrette that convened teams from 20 universities across the U.S. to design community-engaged scholarship faculty development programs (*Gelmon, 2012*), Blanchard shared the curriculum and evaluation results of her campus’ Faculty Engaged Scholars program (*Blanchard, 2012*).

Structures and policies that support community-engaged scholarship.

Discussant Barbara Holland, director, Academic Initiatives in Social Inclusion, University of Sydney, offered participants eight assertions important to thinking about structures and policies supporting community-engaged scholarship (*Holland, 2010*).

1. This is not the first time that common or traditional approaches to defining and rewarding scholarship have been out of alignment with faculty activities.
2. There are many different conceptions of community engagement and community-engaged scholarship, and to some degree those differences are necessary and appropriate to local contexts.
3. Rewarding community engagement and rewarding community-engaged scholarship require different processes and policies. Most community-engaged scholarship activities can be rewarded within current policies.
4. Changes in academic culture and values around community-engaged scholarship require us to clarify the distinction between community-engaged scholarship and public service activities. Both are legitimate academic work, but one is scholarly and one is not.

5. Universal agreement is not needed to create strong institutional support and recognition for community engagement and community-engaged scholarship.
6. The academic workforce is rapidly changing, and the new entrants are supportive of community-engaged scholarship.
7. The field needs to create exemplars that show how community-engaged scholarship is similar to familiar forms of scholarly work.
8. Do not work on this agenda alone—collaboration across institutions can accelerate change.

Strategies for institutional change.

Discussant Rhonda Lenton, associate vice president academic and vice provost, York University, drew on lessons learned from the York University President's Task Force on Community Engagement (*York University, 2010*) to make a compelling case for the importance of attending to how the academy prioritizes community, ensuring students have a voice, considering multiple strategies for change, and framing community-engaged scholarship in a way that lends support to the advancement of other higher education imperatives (*Lenton, 2010*).

Conference Participant Discussions

Following each panel, conference participants met in small groups with discussants and presenters to reflect on the presentations individually and as a collective. They discussed what they learned, and identified actions they believed critical to moving community-engaged scholarship work forward. A team of graduate students and postdoctoral fellows conducted a thematic analysis of the notes from these table discussions; they were joined by Linda Hawkins, director of the Institute for Community Engaged Scholarship at the University of Guelph. They presented a summary of the analyses to participants. This session afforded an opportunity for the conference participants to reflect further on the discussions of the previous day and advance new questions and considerations moving into the second day of the conference.

Common themes identified by conference participants were organized into four categories: conceptual challenges, values and tensions, opportunities for action, and the need to learn more.

These categories, elaborated in the conference proceedings (*Wenger et al., 2011*), are briefly summarized below.

Conceptual challenges.

Conceptual challenges included definitions of key concepts (e.g., what is community-engaged scholarship, what is good community-engaged scholarship, what is knowledge, what is peer review?), participants (e.g., who is community, who is an expert, who is a peer?), and actions (e.g., how do we engage community more fully, how do we evaluate community-engaged scholarship?).

Values and tensions.

Values and tensions centered on the concept and practice of community-engaged scholarship (e.g., distinguish community-engaged scholarship from service-learning, recognize the relevance of community-engaged scholarship to a variety of disciplines), mutually beneficial relationships (e.g., recognize that relationships are developed within a historical context, make space for reflection and re-evaluation), power dynamics (e.g., consider who creates, funds, and controls knowledge; recognize power that is held within the community), flexibility (e.g., tolerate ambiguity, pick your battles), and creativity (e.g., view challenges and failures as opportunities for learning, frame community-engaged scholarship language in terms that administrators understand and value).

Opportunities for action.

Opportunities for action included creating a welcoming institutional environment (e.g., plan effective change strategies from the bottom up and the top down, align community-engaged scholarship with existing institutional values, build community-engaged scholarship into job descriptions and recruitment practices), evaluating and rewarding community-engaged scholarship (e.g., have community-engaged faculty serve on promotion and tenure committees, train promotion and tenure committees and department chairs in community-engaged scholarship), developing structures and resources across Canada and within institutions (e.g., a consortium of community-engaged universities, campus-wide centers for community-engaged scholarship), and attending to skill development (e.g., provide ongoing faculty development, emphasize training of graduate and undergraduate students).

The need to learn more.

The need to learn more was framed as research questions about the practice of community-engaged scholarship (e.g., what are best practices for partnerships, how does one move from service to scholarship?) and the evaluation of community-engaged scholarship (e.g., what are models for peer review by community members, what is the impact of community-engaged scholarship on social issues?). Documenting and mobilizing knowledge (e.g., lessons learned, tools, and methods) was viewed as critical to the learning process.

Conference Evaluation

The conference concluded on a note of optimism as participants shared plans for following up with others they had met and acting on knowledge they had gained. These plans were underscored in the participant evaluations. The vast majority of participants agreed that the conference had influenced how they thought about community-engaged scholarship and believed the learning would impact how they did their job. Respondents offered that they were leaving the conference with new ideas. There was excitement around the opportunity to connect with colleagues across the U.S.-Canada border and appreciation of the range of participants, though some suggested a future conference with involvement of more community organizations.

As part of a process of continual learning through the sharing of knowledge, conference organizers tracked resources mentioned by speakers and participants (see Appendix). For their part, the conference organizers pledged their commitment to publishing and widely disseminating the proceedings. The conference co-sponsoring organizations—Community-Campus Partnerships for Health and the University of Guelph—reiterated their plans for continued collaboration around advancing community-engaged scholarship in Canada. Indeed, they have since formalized a partnership among eight Canadian universities (<http://cescholarship.ca>).

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About the Authors

Sarena D. Seifer is executive director of Community-Campus Partnerships for Health, a nonprofit organization that promotes health equity and social justice through partnerships between communities and higher educational institutions. Her work focuses on ensuring the conditions are in place for these partnerships to thrive and to transform the people, organizations, and communities involved. Seifer earned her bachelor's degree from Washington University in St. Louis and her master's and medical degrees from Georgetown University.

Lisa Wenger is graduate research assistant at the Institute for Community Engaged Scholarship at the University of Guelph. Her research focuses on gender and health, culture and illness, community-based research, qualitative methodologies, masculinities and men's health. Wenger earned her bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Waterloo and completes her doctoral degree in 2012 in Family Relations and Human Development at the University of Guelph.

Linda Hawkins is co-founder of the Institute for Community Engaged Scholarship and the Research Shop at the University of Guelph. Her interests include designing and facilitating community-university partnerships around community research needs and building capacity for community engagement among community, faculty and students. Hawkins earned her bachelor's degree from the University of Toronto and her master's degree from the University of Guelph.

Appendix: Community-Engaged Scholarship Resources

To participate in the ongoing sharing of community-engaged scholarship resources, subscribe to Community-Campus Partnerships for Health's community-engaged scholarship mailing list at <https://mailman2.u.washington.edu/mailman/listinfo/comm-engagedscholarship>.

Organizations and Programs

Campus Compact. <http://www.compact.org>

Canadian Alliance of Community Service Learning.

<http://www.communityservicelearning.ca/>

Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching's

Community Engagement Elective Classification of Higher Educational Institutions.

http://classifications.carnegiefoundation.org/descriptions/community_engagement.php?key=1213

Community-Based Research Canada.

<http://communityresearchcanada.ca/>

Community-Campus Partnerships for Health.

<http://www.ccph.info>

Faculty Engaged Scholars Program at UNC–Chapel Hill.

<http://www.unc.edu/cps/faculty-engaged-scholars.php>

IARSLCE Graduate Students' Network.

http://www.researchslce.org/_Files/GSN_Site/Join_GSN.asp

(New website coming soon)

Imagining America. <http://www.imaginingamerica.org>

International Association for Research on Service-Learning and
Community Engagement (IARSLCE).

<http://www.researchslce.org>

Knowledge Commons. <http://knowledgecommons.ning.com/>

Engaged Scholarship Consortium.

<http://www.outreachscholarship.org>

Rewarding Community-Engaged Scholarship: Towards the
Transformation of University Policies & Practices.

<http://www.cescholarship.ca>

Online Toolkits and Databases

Anchor Institutions Toolkit: A Guide for Neighborhood

Revitalization. <http://www.upenn.edu/ccp/anchortoolkit/>

Community-Engaged Scholarship Toolkit.

<http://www.communityengagedscholarship.info>

Database of Faculty Mentors & Portfolio Reviewers.

<http://facultydatabase.info>

Developing & Sustaining Community-Based Participatory

Research Partnerships. <http://www.cbprcurriculum.info>

Yaffle. <http://www.yaffle.ca>

Journals and Other Publication Outlets

AACU journal *Peer Review*.

<http://www.aacu.org/peerreview/index.cfm>

CES4Health.info (a place to publish diverse products of community-
engaged scholarship, including videos, resource guides, policy
briefs, curricula, etc.). <http://www.CES4Health.info>

Community-Campus Partnerships for Health online list of
journals that publish community-engaged scholarship.

<http://depts.washington.edu/ccph/links2.html#Journals>

Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement (JHEOE).
<http://openjournals.libs.uga.edu/index.php/jheoe/index>
Metropolitan Universities Journal. (MUJ), including theme issue
on the Community-Engaged Scholarship for Health
Collaborative, <http://www.cumuonline.org/muj.aspx>
Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning.
<http://www.umich.edu/~mjcs/>

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