

Review by Glenn Sterner

Community–university partnerships are an essential component of higher education’s contribution to our society. These partnerships have the potential to create a context for public access to the knowledge created within our institutions. At a time when American public opinion of higher education continues to wane, reinvigorating and reestablishing our relationship with the public is critical to future support for our work. This may seem self-serving, that the motivation for establishing community–university partnerships is a public relations strategy. Rather, it ensures that the knowledge creation process has a conduit for application, and through our partnerships with community members we enrich our understanding of concepts and phenomena by learning from local practical knowledge and wisdom. This respectful, reciprocal, and mutually beneficial relationship ensures that the knowledge creation and application process remains relevant.

Higher education must reclaim its public purpose, and our institutions must strive to be publicly-engaged colleges and universities. Institutions that are assisting in this endeavor embrace and implement a shift toward an engaged scholarship paradigm across the missions of teaching, research, and service. Engaged scholarship, with its roots in Ernest Boyer’s work, references the endeavors of scholars within the academy who partner with the public, across disciplinary lines, to engage in projects for the public good. These partnerships are grounded in the principles of mutual respect, reciprocity, and plurality, ensuring that they are not merely one-directional or university centric. Although some institutions and scholars are exemplars of engaged scholarship, others struggle with how to develop this approach to their work.

Service-learning is one approach that may be employed within the umbrella of engaged scholarship. The term service-learning refers to a teaching technique that bridges the classroom–community divide. Students engage with community-based issues through partnerships between the faculty member(s) and community. This teaching approach enhances student learning while simultaneously addressing critical, community-identified issues. Kronick, Cunningham, and Gourley help to bring greater nuance to our understanding of service-learning through their text *Experiencing Service-Learning*.

The target audience is explicitly students interested in service-learning and faculty members who hope to understand service-learning from the student perspective. This important detail is easily overlooked if one neglects to read the preface. This is not meant to be a “how to” for service-learning, but a tool to help students make meaning of their experiences in communities. The text is relevant not only for undergraduates but for graduate students, as it includes sections that reflect graduate student experiences. It will also be of interest to faculty who are new to establishing service-learning within their courses. It helps to contextualize the deep learning that can occur during student involvement in service-learning experiences. Additionally, it provides a rationale for the importance of integrating service-learning within teaching in higher education by explicating the outcomes for students. Finally, although those within higher education are clearly the book’s intended audience, it should be noted that utilizing student reflections to help community partners recognize their powerful role in service-learning may serve to catalyze and orient them during these experiences. I find that understanding the learning they provide students empowers community partners’ local knowledge, reinforcing the mutual respect and reciprocity in university–community partnerships.

I found the text was organized into three sections. The first, including the introduction, Chapter 1, and Chapter 2, emphasizes theory. The second and largest section, Chapters 3–6, evidences the learning within the student service-learning experience through direct quotations of student reflections. Finally, the third section includes Chapter 7, the conclusion, and the appendices, and may be most helpful for faculty interested in implementing service-learning. It is worth noting that the book’s examples and reflections do not provide a comprehensive review of student experiences across service-learning or of service-learning experiences. Rather, they represent the experiences of students at one institution and examples of service-learning projects within this institution. This text is thus best understood as a case study, and may be best utilized in conjunction with other service-learning and engaged scholarship that can offer points of comparison enhancing the perspectives of the students and authors of this text.

In the first section of this book (the introduction, Chapter 1, and Chapter 2), the authors provide a brief overview of service-learning and related theoretical foundations. The first chapter helps to orient the student within the context for their service-learning experience, recognizing the importance of cultural competence

and sensitivity. This chapter could have been strengthened by integrating more fully the concept of reflexivity and acknowledging the need to deeply reflect upon the role a student plays within the context of a service-learning experience. Reflexivity is an important skill, not just in service-learning and engaged scholarship, but for being a responsible citizen in our world. Helping students to build this skill, to critically examine how they interface with, interact with, and impact individuals according to their values, beliefs, biases, and actions within a community, will ensure that the experience is not only beneficial to the student, but also respects the local community and its members. The second chapter provides an important section on experiential learning, breaking down the concept into three interrelated components: sensing, acting, and reflecting. This provides a critical guide for how students may make meaning of their experience, to ensure that the deeper learning of their service-learning experience is not lost. The authors bring this critical component to the scholarship of teaching and learning and to the scholarship of engagement, as this model for learning helps move the student's activities from volunteerism to service-learning.

The next section of the text, Chapters 3–6, is the largest, providing student reflections and testimonials. The third chapter provides reflection and learning from a graduate student perspective, and would be best suited for that audience. The fourth chapter provides a lengthy account of undergraduate student reflections, broken into thematic sections, such as student background and its effects on the service-learning experience, student experiences in mentoring in service-learning, and impacts on students' lives. The fifth chapter explores how service-learning may affect a student once they leave their institution, using one of the author's reflections as a case study. Finally, Chapter 6 explores the transformational nature of service-learning and its effects on student learning. Although this section was quite comprehensive in its use of quotes to evidence the powerful learning students experience within service-learning, the presentation of the data could have been strengthened by utilizing a more dialogic approach, inviting reflection on these quotes and experiences. This would allow the student reading these chapters to more fluidly identify how their own experiences compare with the examples presented.

In the final section (Chapter 7, the conclusion, and the appendices), the authors provide several resources that may be of assistance to faculty. Chapter 7 identifies several challenges in implementing service-learning that a new faculty member may wish to be aware of. The conclusion provides a nice, albeit brief, sum-

mary of the main service-learning concepts and the rationale for service-learning initiatives within higher education. Finally, the appendices provide a rich description of the authors' experiences in service-learning as well as examples of service-learning projects. It is important to reiterate that this text is not a "how to" on service-learning, but instead provides a brief overview of opportunities and challenges that faculty, as well as students, may want to consider when exploring and beginning to utilize service-learning in their classrooms. Such information is likely less important for seasoned faculty who may, however, find utilizing portions of the first two sections within their classroom helpful in orienting their students to service-learning.

Experiencing Service-Learning is a helpful text within the greater context of service-learning literature and within the umbrella of engaged scholarship. It adds to the understanding of the impact of service-learning on students, emphasizing the important role this teaching method and strategy may play in the context of university–community partnerships. Although explicitly student-centric, this text helps to elucidate how an engaged institution can assist in community matters as well as prepare students to be engaged, involved citizens of our society once they leave our institutions. It is through experiences such as this that higher education can begin to reclaim its public purpose, and rebuild our connection to the publics we serve.

About the Reviewer

Glenn Sterner is a Ph.D. candidate in rural sociology in the Department of Agricultural Economics, Sociology, and Education at the Pennsylvania State University. His research explores how communities may maximize their potential for developing innovative solutions to the issues and opportunities they face. He received his M.A. degree at Michigan State University.