

Shaker, G. G. (Ed.). (2015). *Faculty work and the public good: Philanthropy, engagement, and academic professionalism*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press. 304 pp.

Review by David J. Weerts

Even casual observers of American higher education would note that the scrutiny of the academic profession has reached new heights. As I write this review, Wisconsin politicians continue to challenge tenure laws and shared governance throughout the University of Wisconsin system. At stake are traditional views about academic work that have underpinned U.S. higher education for nearly a century. Many educators see the standoff in Wisconsin as a bellwether for public universities across the country. The narrative remains familiar: Faculty are not teaching enough, their research may not be worth the public investment, and lifetime appointments through tenure may be a thing of the past.

It is in this stormy context that Genevieve Shaker's thought-provoking book, *Faculty Work and the Public Good*, invites readers to contemplate the role of college and university faculty in society. The edited volume features a cadre of 23 distinguished higher education scholars who wrestle with the concept of "philanthropy" as a framework to understand faculty commitments beyond their traditionally understood roles of teaching, research, and service. The authors are guided by a common definition of philanthropy as "voluntary action for the public good" (Payton, 1988, p. 3). This definition provides a conceptual platform to discuss faculty work that goes above and beyond contractual obligations. The book's 17 chapters are divided into five sections: "Conceptualizing Philanthropy in Faculty Work," "Purposes and Motivation for Faculty Work," "Philanthropy and Academic Professionalism," "Faculty Leadership and Community Engagement," and "The Public Good and Future of Academic Work."

The book's primary contribution is unearthing diverse perspectives about faculty work and ways in which the public contributions of faculty might be understood in a larger societal context. An underlying subtext is that neoliberal policies are reshaping views of faculty as a managed workforce. Pushing back against this perspective, the authors promote a broader view of the professoriate as a profession, a vocation, or even a "calling." In this book, written almost entirely by faculty, some authors provide accounts of their

own acts of philanthropy, and others rely on philosophical or empirical approaches to discuss philanthropic behaviors of faculty.

A discussion topic common to multiple chapters was the use of faculty time. Freedom of time was typically viewed by the authors as the primary resource through which faculty could provide voluntary action for the public good. Time was conceptualized as a zero-sum resource and, for some, the primary “gift” within Payton’s definition of philanthropy. An inherent challenge in the discussion is the task of disentangling faculty work into discrete categories of duty or philanthropy. Since faculty are paid for a broad set of activities, segregating these categories is not an easy task. Thus, the chapters raise several questions for readers to consider: What are the criteria by which we might understand philanthropic acts among faculty? Must “gifted time” be purely sacrificial, or can it retain some level of self-interest and still be considered philanthropic? Should philanthropic actions be promoted as shared norms of behavior across the professoriate? These are some of the complex issues that merit further debate.

What remains elusive in this book is a shared definition of “the public good” that is embedded within Payton’s definition of philanthropy. Often, contributors use broad phrases such as “faculty are guardians of the public interest” or “faculty attend to the greater good” in describing faculty roles that do not fit squarely into their contractual obligations. One contributor discusses the freedom of faculty to pursue the truth, and having the opportunity to work on things viewed as “best serving society.” However, the authors are reluctant to consider how such views may be contested in the current political landscape. For example, a growing number of lawmakers may argue that the most compelling public interests for colleges and universities include reducing costs, increasing graduation rates, and better serving workforce needs. Such a view of the “public good” would call on faculty to devote their time more fully to activities that promote student success, yet this alternative perspective ignores the scholarly contributions of faculty that promote social and economic progress. How do we reconcile these competing ideas of the public good?

William Plater provides some perspective on this issue in his concluding reflections with R. Eugene Rice and John Saltmarsh in Chapter 17. Plater suggests that a new social contract must be formed among faculty, the public, and institutions. He suggests that each of these entities has a stake in understanding faculty contributions, and whether such contributions are “voluntary, an expectation of employment, or the duty of the profession” (*p.*

259). He concludes by asking, “How do we make the discussion of the public good public?” (p. 259). From this reviewer’s perspective, Plater makes an important point: The dialogue about higher education public good is seemingly confined to elite circles. The discussion must be broadened among constituents who have an important stake in the future of higher education and more broadly, the nation.

Of particular interest to readers of the *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement* is the discussion about faculty work in the context of community engagement. The contributions in this area demonstrate how adoption of and understandings about engagement remain uneven across the academy. For example, one author discusses *scholarship of engagement* as a nuanced term to describe service to society, without unpacking it as a distinct methodology to conduct academic work. Another contributor discusses K-12 schools as labs to do research, implying that knowledge generated from such scholarship constitutes a service or gift to society. These perspectives likely vary from those of many readers of this journal who view community-based scholarship through the lens of reciprocity and mutual benefit (e.g., the Carnegie definition of engagement; *Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching*, 2015). One group of scholars, Liang, Sandmann, and Jaeger (Chapter 16), write from this perspective and outline the complexities of conflating the terms philanthropy and engagement. These authors suggest that philanthropy is often viewed as an act of charity, which may diminish the view of community members as equal partners with those of the university. However, Payton’s (1988) full definition of philanthropy focuses on community, compassion, and mutually common values, which capture the spirit of the community engagement movement. This broader definition is compatible with contemporary understandings of engagement, and making this connection helps to knit the concepts together in a more cohesive way.

Overall, *Faculty Work and the Public Good* is an insightful book for readers who seek to understand academic perspectives on faculty work as it contributes to society. One limitation of the volume is that it almost exclusively reflects the voices of faculty. In consequence, it does not provide a broader view about how important stakeholders such as legislators and community/industry leaders may conceptualize faculty work and the public good. As Plater suggests, it is important to invite these stakeholders into this conversation as they shape understandings about the academy in the new century. Despite this limitation, the volume provides useful

perspectives on higher education for the public good from an academic point of view. As with any good book, the work raises a number of questions that merit additional consideration. For example, some authors discuss the changing academic workforce that increasingly relies on contingent faculty to replace tenured faculty. Given this important shift, how might we think about faculty work for the public good through nontenured appointments? In a period of rapid change in the academy, this book provides a compelling basis for launching a much-needed dialogue about the future of the professoriate.

References

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About the Reviewer

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