Building the Field of Higher Education Engagement: A 20-Year Retrospective

Lorilee R. Sandmann, Andrew Furco, and Katherine R. Adams

Abstract

For this 20th anniversary issue of the *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*, 11 articles were selected through a Delphi survey of editorial board members. A review of these articles reflects the evolution of the field of outreach and community engagement and maturation of the "scholarship of engagement." In particular, 3 major shifts can be noted: a shift in terminology, a shift from program institutionalization to institutional transformation, and a shift from simple lists and practices to more integrated and complex frameworks and modeling. The review reveals that there continues to be a role for such journals in archiving and documenting as well as stimulating and advancing theory, practice, and policy related to higher education community engagement and scholarship.

Introducing This Issue

*O*ver the past 20 years, the field of higher education outreach and community engagement has grown and matured substantially. In this time, we have seen a proliferation of new engagement-focused centers and programs on campuses, a rise in the number of journals and other publications that explore engagement issues in higher education, a continued growth of conference programs and networks (both domestic and global) focused on advancing higher education community engagement, and an increase in the number of senior-level positions responsible for institutionalizing engagement on college campuses. We have also witnessed a shift in the field's discourse such that today's engagement-focused literature reveals a deeper, more mature understanding of the complexities inherent in doing engaged work than was reflected in the publications of the early 1990s when discussions of the "new engagement" first emerged. The *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement (JHEOE)* is a source that has been able to document this growth and maturity. From the early articles that appeared in the first issue in 1996 (when this publication was called the *Journal of Public Service and Outreach*) to the contemporary papers that are published in the *Journal* today, *JHEOE* has helped trace the field's journey as community engage-

ment has continued its movement from the margins to the mainstream of higher education.

As we celebrate the *Journal's* 20th anniversary, it is fitting to take a look at how the field of community engagement has taken shape, evolved, and matured over the years and how today it, as a global phenomenon, is one of higher education's most influential reform agendas. In this issue, we present 11 articles that trace the field's growth and development.

The selection of these articles is not arbitrary. To create this volume, we sought out the opinions and recollections of 37 of the *Journal's* current and former editorial board members (present editor excluded), who applied the Delphi technique to identify the *JHEOE* articles they believed were most seminal and influential over the past 20 years. In the first round of the Delphi survey, the editorial team members—all of whom are longstanding leaders and experts in higher education community engagement—were asked to name one article from the 20-year history of *JHEOE* that, in their opinion, was "the most important and/or has the most impact on the field." After aggregation of the selected articles, Round 2 of the Delphi survey asked editorial team members to rank each of the articles identified in Round 1 on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 awarded to those articles thought to be "*most important and/or have the most impact on the field.*" The result of the Delphi procedures is this collection of 11 articles published from 1996 to 2012. Presented chronologically, the articles reveal the nuanced yet important shifts in the terminology, frameworks, and voices that have defined and shaped the engagement field over the years. Each article, in its own right, is a seminal piece that in its time helped advance our thinking about the future of colleges' and universities' mission to serve the public good. Through the articles collected in this issue, we are able to trace community engagement's coming of age as a new field in higher education.

As authors of this introductory piece, we read through the set of articles with an eye toward understanding why leaders in the field selected these particular works. As we read, we kept the following questions in mind: What makes these articles seminal, influential, important, and enduring? What type of article is each (philosophical, theoretical, historical, empirical, or other), and what are the main topics covered? What themes do we see across the articles (use of language of engagement, etc.), and what is not addressed in this set of articles? By no means was our effort an empirical, systematic qualitative content analysis. Rather, we sought to track our general impressions, rereading these articles with the benefit

of having experienced them when they were first published, then reexperiencing them years later. Initially, we questioned whether, as a collection, the articles represent an affirmation of existing practices or a challenge to higher education and those who see themselves as engaged scholars. For example, we find that Boyer's *(1996)* seminal work served as not merely a challenge to the field, but as *The Challenge*. Boyer's groundbreaking article "The Scholarship of Engagement" was ahead of its time in pushing higher education to reconsider how it defines what qualifies as "scholarship," arguably the most valued hallmark of higher education. "The Scholarship of Engagement," once considered a revolutionary piece, has stood the test of time, serving for the authors of the articles that follow as the first introduction to what now represents a critical and important philosophy of contemporary higher education.

Drawing New Meanings

Revisiting these articles found us reassessing our initial thoughts and perspectives on these seminal works. In addition to being reinspired, we drew from our readings new insights; we saw perspectives that we had missed years earlier during our initial readings. Perhaps this merely reflects the benefit of hindsight. But interestingly, we found that particular terms that seemed abstruse and amorphous in our initial reading are now familiar, clear, and understandable. Perhaps in our initial reading as relative novices starting our respective journeys into learning about the scholarship of engagement, the concepts, terminology, or philosophies presented in the articles did not readily map onto our schemas of understanding. For example, we initially did not recognize or appreciate the value of the nuanced distinctions among Boyer's forms of scholarship. We even questioned the viability of applying his framework to the day's academic culture. At that time, perhaps because the ideas of the "new engagement" had not yet been codified, Boyer's discussion seemed a bit obscure and even somewhat idealistic. But now we, along with the many others who rely on his work, easily recognize and can fully appreciate the relevance, importance, and value of Boyer's introduction to this new scholarship paradigm. Indeed, it is through this hindsight that we are able to recognize and appreciate the enormous benefit that Boyer's work and all of the works in this collection have provided during influential periods of our journey.

Distinguishing Characteristics

We sought to identify what distinguished these articles as seminal pieces. One distinguishing feature that we noted is that most of the articles in this collection are generally considered the first to raise or bring to the fore important issues about engaged work. Like Boyer's influential introduction to the scholarship of engagement, Byrne's *(1998)* article introduced the Kellogg Commission's goals into the broader national discourse of higher education reform, igniting the call for higher education to "take charge of change" *(p. 7)*. Similarly, in her article, Holland *(1999)* broke ground in presenting the first empirical discussion of faculty motivation, obstacles, and participation in what was at the time generally referred to as public service. Driscoll and Sandmann's *(2001)* work inaugurated the National Review Board for the Scholarship of Engagement, premiering a documentation and evaluation system for engaged faculty promotion and tenure. O'Meara and Jaeger *(2006)* took a cardinal look at the integration of engagement in graduate education, building the framework for how we today examine the role of community engagement in graduate education. And Franz *(2010)* presented the first attempt to consider the nexus between the individual and institutional factors of engaged scholarship through a proposed holistic integrative model. Each of these articles has served as a foundation on which deeper and fuller discussions about the new, contemporary higher education engagement are being built. *JHEOE* has thus provided a forum to introduce and bring attention to new and emerging concepts that have had fundamental impacts on the field of outreach and engagement. It is important to note that all 11 articles in this collection are anchored in western-focused (mostly U.S.) discussions, reflecting the locus for much of the field-building work on engagement. As the new engagement agenda incorporates more global perspectives, we are finding that the new contributions to the *Journal* are commensurately more global in focus and international in scope.

Just as the changing discourse in the articles reflects the rapidly growing and evolving nature of the field, these articles reflect that the *Journal* itself, specifically through the type of articles it has published, has to some extent shaped the direction the engagement field has taken. For example, much of the discourse on community engagement in the 1990s was centered on exploring issues of the emerging practice of service-learning. Indeed, at the time, service-learning-focused journals such as the *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning* dominated the field. *JHEOE*'s focus on examining wider issues of outreach and community engagement

offered field shapers such as Boyer and Holland unique opportunities to examine the broader role and implications of community engagement in higher education. By providing a space for these broader conversations, *JHEOE* helped give rise and visibility to new and emerging discussions on the role of community engagement across our colleges and universities.

In our review of the articles, we also sought to identify what discussions or foci might have been omitted from this collection. Interestingly, we found that although the community engagement field has been criticized for lacking research evidence regarding the impacts of community engagement on participants, and much effort has been made through *JHEOE* and other journals to strengthen the field's research base, only one empirical article *(Holland, 1999)* made the list for inclusion in this collection. Also missing from this set of articles is attention to community voice, an aspect of high-quality practice that seems to receive much rhetoric but only minimal discussion in the *Journal*'s articles and papers. We also note an absence of articles that discuss issues pertaining to student learning and curriculum. This is especially surprising given that most of the field's literature to date has focused on the impacts of higher education community engagement and service-learning experiences on student development. Also missing, even among the more recent articles, is attention to engagement issues in non-U.S. settings and the broader global perspectives of outreach and engagement. Given the rise of the new higher education community engagement agenda across many countries, we expected to see at least one non-U.S.-based article among those selected for this retrospective collection.

We questioned whether the absence of some this content was a result of the nature of the Delphi study and selection process itself. We also questioned whether the authors' name recognition affected the participating editors' choice of articles. Unfortunately, we do not have the information needed to answer these questions. Nonetheless, we raise them to acknowledge that in considering the full repository of articles published in *JHEOE* over the past 20 years, the 11 articles in this collection represent only a small portion of the many important topics and issues that the *Journal* has presented.

The Evolution of Terminology

In rereading the articles and reflecting on this collection, we identified a set of distinct shifts that have occurred over the *Journal*'s

20-year span. These shifts paint a picture of how the discussion of higher education community engagement has developed, evolved, and matured over the years to become a codified field of study and practice. Most apparent is the change in the terms, language, and definitions that have been used to describe engagement work. As we see in this collection, the earlier works focus on public service and outreach, and more recent works emphasize engagement and engaged scholarship, revealing the broadening and maturing of the community engagement discourse. Drawing from the deliberations of the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities, Byrne *(1998)* was one of the first to examine the differences in terminology between outreach and engagement. Outreach, as Byrne describes, is one-directional and implies that knowledge is transferred *from* the university *outward* to the community it serves. Engagement, on the other hand, involves knowledge exchange in both directions. As Byrne states, "engagement is mutually beneficial to the university and to society and frequently involves shared goals, agendas, and measures of success" *(pp. 4–5)*. Such definitional clarification helped set in motion the shift in thinking of engagement as a reciprocal act that values the needs, knowledge, and expertise of the community.

We find in this collection that clarifying the language of engagement is an ongoing issue that remains unresolved. In reviewing different literature sources, Giles *(2008)* exposed the ongoing challenge by examining the variety of community engagement-related terms in the literature. His article offers the most diverse set of examples regarding different terms that are used as proxies for engagement, such as *public scholarship, scholarship of engagement, service-learning,* and *community-based participatory research.* He suggests that a "big tent" is needed to capture the variations in meaning and definitions across the expanse of "umbrella" terms that have failed to provide universally-defined clarity among engagement scholars and practitioners. As Giles declares, "the scholarly challenge is to continue to examine these terms and traditions" *(p. 102)* because the methodology and theory of community engagement cannot be developed when the terms of engagement are nebulous and ill-defined.

This collection of 11 articles also reveals the shifting and sometimes competing conceptualizations of scholarship. Leaning on Boyer's notion of the scholarship of engagement, Lynton *(1996)* sought to broaden the notion of what it means to be a "scholar" and thus promoted strengthening the nexus between scholarly work and community engagement. However, Schön (as cited in *Fear &*

Sandmann, 2001-2002) took a different tack, promoting a focus on higher education's "technical rationality" to secure the advancement of rigorous and systemically-applied scholarly procedures. Schön argues that Boyer's "new scholarship" would require research universities to adopt a new epistemology, which in Schön's view is not viable or achievable. Fear and Sandmann support Schön's admonition about using terminology aligned with technical rationality since such usage would "constrain the reach" *(p. 32)* that engagement could achieve.

With the increased focus on engaged scholarship in the late 2000s, Franz *(2010)* reinforced Giles's *(2008)* call for definitional clarity, suggesting that there needs to be "a clear definition of engaged scholarship at the core… for consistent understanding and application of the work across the individual, institutional, and interinstitutional levels" *(p. 34)*. Thus, like Byrne a decade earlier, Franz sought to bring to the fore a definition of "engaged scholarship" that emphasized the two-way relationship between academia and the community and how the mutuality of the relationship adds value for both partners. In her article, Franz championed "legacy" as a notion designed to incorporate into the definition of engagement the intention of both academy and community to make a difference. She also supported the notion that the information or outcomes produced through this reciprocal arrangement further enhance the academic disciplines and the dissemination of knowledge that is produced. As one of the more recent articles in the collection, Franz's paper reveals how much the field has matured, showing how Boyer's scholarship of engagement has evolved from a philosophy of scholarship to a legitimized practice that Franz defines as characterized by mutually beneficial campus–community engagement, high-quality scholarship, and impact on the public good through the incorporation of academic disciplines.

As a collection, the articles reveal a lack of consistency in terminology related to higher education community engagement. This supports Giles's *(2008)* call for building a more clear understanding through systematic inquiry. Although many institutions have adopted the Carnegie Foundation's *(n.d.)* definition, which casts community engagement as "collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity" *("How Is 'Community Engagement' Defined?", para. 1)*, the articles' authors subscribe to several definitions of engagement, providing evidence that the term has yet to be codified universally.

With no national research agenda under way to help more clearly define the distinctions and nuances among the various engagement terms, and without a concerted effort to create the definitional "big tent" for engagement that Giles *(2008)* recommended, the development of a universal understanding of engagement is likely to remain elusive for some time.

From Program Institutionalization to Institutional Transformation

Beyond shifts in the language of engagement, this set of seminal articles also reveals a shift in emphasis regarding community engagement's role in higher education and the emergence of a new engagement agenda. We see in the earlier pieces a focus on building support for community engagement by making the case for its inclusion in the existing system of higher education. For example, both Boyer *(1996)* and Lynton *(1996)* sought to raise the value and importance of outreach-focused efforts by establishing standards of practice that link outreach to the existing values of scholarship. Because prevailing norms of practice in higher education value peer-reviewed scholarly work, having outreach and engagement peer-reviewed by both members of the community and peers in the discipline, as Boyer *(1996)* and Lynton *(1996)* championed, increased the legitimacy of community-engaged research and teaching as academic, scholarly pursuits. Around the same time, Holland *(1999)* extended this premise by recommending a set of practices for deepening the institutionalization of community engagement through the incorporation of engagement principles into the existing institutional structures and culture. Two years later, Driscoll and Sandmann *(2001)* codified a set of guidelines for evaluating engaged scholarship that mirrored the quality expectations for traditional scholarly work.

In contrast, the more recent articles move away from a focus on embedding community engagement within the existing higher education system, instead emphasizing the importance of transforming higher education to become a new kind of educational system that embraces community engagement as a core value. By 2006, we find O'Meara and Jaeger promoting the reformation of graduate education in ways that make engaged scholarship a central feature of doctoral and other graduate degree programs. In their articles, Franz *(2010)* and Fitzgerald, Bruns, Sonka, Furco, and Swanson *(2012)* promote creating a higher education culture that fully legitimizes, embraces, and supports community-engaged scholarship. This focus on reforming the prevailing expectations

and norms of higher education presents an important shift in the assumptions that undergird the community engagement field. Whereas the initial goal was to make the case for community engagement by exploring strategies and enabling mechanisms to embed it within the existing structures of higher education (e.g., the prevailing curriculum structures and reward systems), the current goal assumes that the overall culture of higher education needs to change fundamentally to embrace broader approaches and multiple forms of scholarship that fully support the principles and practices of community engagement (e.g., serving the public good, mutual benefits, broader research impacts). This shift in discourse has helped move the emphasis away from finding ways to fit community engagement programming into the existing system of higher education and toward building a new kind of higher education institution and "engaged campuses" in what has become known as the "new engagement" agenda.

Because of this shift toward broader institutional change and higher education transformation, community engagement literature now presents more complex analyses and deeper understanding of the factors that contribute to building more engaged higher education institutions. This focus on a new kind of engagement that is part of a new kind of higher education institution reflects the current pressures on higher education to embrace a broader array of pedagogies, epistemologies, and research methodologies. The works that are now submitted to the *Journal* are increasingly challenging the traditional structures of higher education and calling for a new kind of higher education system that ensures full alignment with the needs of a 21st-century society.

Toward Greater Integration and Complexity

Academic and popular literature are replete with documentation of the messy, wicked, ill-defined problems of our global society as well as the challenges of decision making, problem solving, and organizational transformation under such conditions of ambiguity and uncertainty. In this context, we see in the conversations within this collection a related shift toward understanding more fully the complexities of these wicked problems and the need for systemic changes across higher education to address these challenging societal issues through community engagement. The earlier articles provide lists of principles, practices, and prescriptions for advancing community engagement. These early works reflected that era's common belief that by adopting and implementing a few simple steps lauded and promoted in the literature, an institution's

community engagement agenda would advance, and community needs would be more effectively addressed. Many institutions adopted Lynton's *(1996)* three-stage conceptual framework (diagnosis, design, delivery) to help evaluate community-engaged scholarly work. We also saw many institutions subscribe to Holland's *(1999)* list of motivations and obstacles to faculty participation in community engagement as higher education institutions sought ways to motivate their faculty to embrace community-engaged research, teaching, and service. Today, however, there is widespread acknowledgment that building an engaged campus is a complex process that requires implementing a multifaceted, multipronged, strategic agenda. In accord with this view, the more recent articles offer complex conceptual frameworks and multidimensional analyses, like those presented by O'Meara and Jaeger *(2006)*; Sandmann, Saltmarsh, and O'Meara *(2008)*; Franz *(2010)*; and Fitzgerald et al. *(2012)*. These more recent articles foreground the broad set of complex issues that higher education systems must attend to in their reform efforts in order to embrace and build the new engagement agenda.

This shift in focus also reflects a growing responsiveness in higher education that has led to viewing community engagement and the scholarship of engagement less as singular constructs to be advanced for their own sake, and more as strategies for accomplishing broader institutional goals and priorities. The more recent articles cast community engagement and the scholarship of engagement less as discrete initiatives to be implemented for their own sake, and more as strategies to fulfill higher education's responsibility to fuel knowledge creation, transfer, and application in ways that enhance societal purposes. This more integrated, systemic view clarifies and amplifies engagement as scholarship, thus becoming a method or a way of doing teaching, learning, and research that involves "others" outside academia who have expertise, wisdom, insights, and lived experience that are essential to the knowledge task at hand.

This shift in the discourse is illustrated by at least three of the more recent articles featured in this collection. In their article, Sandmann et al. *(2008)* offered one of the first broadly integrated models of engagement. They addressed elements necessary for higher education institutions to become supportive environments for the next generation of faculty by presenting a strategies framework that explicates what is needed to prepare individuals (primarily doctoral students and early career faculty) as engaged scholars and learners, while instigating and catalyzing institutions

as learning organizations. This integrated model brings together critical aspects from several knowledge bases, including knowledge of higher education institutional change, preparation of future faculty, the scholarship of engagement, and promising programmatic practices for institutional engagement. Sandmann et al. used these knowledge bases to form two axes: a horizontal axis representing faculty socialization and a vertical axis representing institutionalization. The quadrants created by these axes indicate the "homes" for engaged scholarship—graduate education, disciplinary associations, academic departments, and institutions. Unlike the more one-dimensional models found in the earlier literature, Sandmann et al.'s work represents a notable shift in recognizing the important intersection of the individual and institutional levels of engagement and how these levels interface with critical elements within higher education's prevailing structures and overall system (e.g., graduate schools, promotion and tenure systems, disciplinary affiliations and associations).

Like Sandmann et al. *(2008)*, Franz *(2010)* presented a "holistic and integrated model of engaged scholarship" *(p. 32)* that built on earlier frameworks presented by Boyer *(1996)* and others. Franz's engaged scholarship model brought to the fore the realities of academic life and the increasing productivity required of faculty. Unlike the more linear approaches to strengthening support for engaged scholarship that are found in the early literature, Franz's model identified multiple entry points for faculty and community members to plan, practice, and tell their story of engaged scholarship. Franz presented a set of concentric circles that has at its center a definition of engaged scholarship informed by six leverage points: three relating to the discovery, development, and dissemination of new knowledge and three relating to change in learning, behavior, and/or conditions. The model expands to include various factors and assumptions that affect the potential for engaged scholarship work to take place. The nesting and interrelated nature of the circles is an illustration of the movement toward an understanding of the integrated nature of engagement.

Similarly, in their article, Fitzgerald et al. *(2012)* made the case that a comprehensive institutionalization approach is necessary to make engagement a central feature of higher education. These authors analyzed multiple dimensions of historical and contemporary efforts to institutionalize the "new engagement." Their analysis led us to an integrative framework for scholarship that moves away from emphasizing products (e.g., scholarly publications) to emphasizing impact (e.g., the societal effects of scholarly publications).

They asserted that the new engagement agenda will be realized when "discovery and learning are integrated and enriched through engagement to allow for more effective creation, application, and then re-creation of knowledge that serves society's needs" *(p. 21)*. Without a doubt, the field's increased focus on exploring more integrated and multifaceted models continues to bring a deeper understanding of the complexities inherent in building a 21st-century engagement agenda for higher education.

A Look to the Future

The *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement* has played an important role in documenting and archiving the growth and evolution of an emerging field. Through this review of articles from the last 20 years, we are able to trace the way higher education community engagement has grown and evolved into a mature field of study and practice, and we are also made aware of the many questions about higher education that remain unanswered. Values, definitions, and norms have been investigated and analyzed, perpetuating more standardized usages and practices; however, greater clarity of definition across the nuanced terms is needed. Although more complex frameworks for understanding engagement have been presented, we remain unsure of how the various aspects and dimensions of these frameworks will resonate with the growing global audience of higher education's new engagement agenda. For *JHEOE* and other journals like it, a clarion call remains to continue challenging the prevailing assumptions, practices, and policies of higher education outreach and engagement and to remain a driving force in stimulating conversations and debates that can give voice to new perspectives that can help shape the future of community engagement in higher education.

We are sure that other readers who have watched the field grow and mature will find other shifts—both nuanced and substantial—in this compendium of articles. As we look to the future, and as discussions in the field are elevated and become more global in scope, we believe these seminal articles will continue to serve as a foundation for the field and will endure as some of the field's most influential publications. For those who wish to be encouraged, inspired, and challenged, we recommend reading the pioneering and groundbreaking works in this special issue.

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About the Authors

Lorilee R. Sandmann is professor emeritus at the University of Georgia. She is also editor of the *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement.* Dr. Sandmann's research, teaching, and consulting focuses on leadership and organizational change in higher education, with special emphasis on the institutionalization of community engagement, as well as faculty roles and

rewards related to community-engaged scholarship. She can be reached at sandmann@uga.edu.

Andrew Furco is associate vice president for public engagement at the University of Minnesota, where he is also an associate professor of higher education. His research investigates the impacts and institutionalization of community engagement in K-12 and higher education in the United States and abroad. He received his doctorate from UC Berkeley. His email is afurco@umn.edu.

Katherine R. Adams is an advisor at the University of Georgia. Her research interests are boundary spanning, community engagement, community perspective, and community leadership. Adams earned her Ph.D. in adult education from the University of Georgia. She can be reached at ktswings@uga.edu.