



Why Faculty Reward Policies Should Incentivize Community Engaged Scholarship

John Saltmarsh, University of Massachusetts-Boston

Gene Alonzo Corbin, Tufts University

Prabhdeep Kehal, Brown University

On campuses across the United States, “community engaged scholarship” has emerged as a promising strategy for problem-solving research, civic education, and revitalizing the democratic aspirations of higher education. Originally in response to student and social movement activists of the 1960s and 1970s who fought to make higher education a public good in practice rather than in theory, community engaged scholarship aimed to bring an aspirational democracy committed to equity into higher education’s role in society. This kind of scholarly work connects the core purpose of higher education—the generation and dissemination of knowledge—to efforts to address critical public issues.

Faculty accomplish these vital aims by bringing collaborations with off-campus community partners into their teaching, service, and research and creative activities. In such engaged scholarly activities, faculty collaborate with community partners to advance knowledge and students develop a sense of responsibility to society along with the capacity to act effectively on matters of public importance. Engaging communities in teaching and research increases relevance and improves outcomes.

Community engaged scholarship depends upon mutually beneficial partnerships between campuses and local, regional, national, and global communities. By forging mutually beneficial partnerships between the academy and the community, the resources of higher education are leveraged to address social issues while instilling a passion for civic and democratic engagement in young people. In a time when the relevance and benefits of higher education are questioned by many critics, community engaged scholarship counters ivory-tower stereotypes.

Rewarding Community Engaged Scholarship

A new generation of faculty members are increasingly committing themselves not only to long-standing traditions in their disciplines, but also to emerging forms of scholarship: interdisciplinary, digital, and community engaged scholarship. These innovative approaches represent promising new strategies for teaching and research. However, if systems for rewarding and incentivizing faculty are not realigned, colleges and universities across the country risk forfeiting the benefits.

In the last several decades, community engaged scholarship has become more prevalent. It is no coincidence that this emergence of community engaged scholarship came as women and people with diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, and class backgrounds began entering academia in higher numbers and brought new ideas of how teaching and research could be done and how it could have greater social impact. Colleges and

universities have, in many cases, failed to respond appropriately to emerging forms of scholarship including community engaged scholarship.

The problem stems from misaligned incentives. The practice of community engaged scholarship is at odds with the systems that reward and incentivize traditional forms of scholarship. Research shows that the faculty reward policies often do not reward community engaged scholarship. Or, if they do reward it, they typically recognize it as service—which is typically valued less as a form of scholarly accomplishment in promotion and tenure evaluations and decisions than research and teaching.

Many colleges and universities have not evolved to keep pace with changing faculty demographics and new types of scholarship. The failure to evolve works against the contemporary stated goals of institutions of higher education: advancing knowledge, fostering and valuing diversity, and equipping students to succeed in academia and society. The failure to reward community engaged scholarship also discourages scholars from addressing pressing public problems.

Faculty Reward Policies that Value Community Engaged Scholarship

Faculty reward policies need to be aligned to reward community engaged scholarship through fair evaluation. Institutions of higher education and their surrounding communities will benefit if colleges and universities work to cultivate a culture of engagement and equip community engaged scholars to thrive. To do this, colleges and universities should:

- **Integrate language about community engagement into institutional and departmental level policies for each faculty role.** This language should define community engagement clearly (so that it is not confused with applied research, public scholarship, community-based scholarship, and other forms of experiential education). These policies should recognize that teaching, service, and research and creative output are mutually reinforcing activities.
- **Identify and reward the “products” of community engaged scholarship.** Research products resulting from community engaged scholarship may be published in academic venues like peer-reviewed journals and university press books, but such products should not be the only outcomes. Community engaged scholarship research also produce publicly relevant results—in the form of reports, exhibits, multimedia presentations, installations, policy briefs, court briefings, and legislation.
- **Clarify how impact is assessed in community engaged scholarship.** Faculty should be rewarded for advancing knowledge while pursuing teaching, service, and research and creative activities in ways that improve people’s lives. Assessment of these scholarly activities must be adjusted to include community or societal impact. The number of publications and citations faculty members produce can still be important while enabling the consideration of other metrics.

How Higher Education Can Fulfill Its Democratic Aspirations

Rewarding community engaged scholarship fairly is an essential step in the evolution of higher education. Explicitly rewarding engagement allows campus leaders, state policy makers, boards of higher education, faculty senates, faculty unions, higher education organizations, and academic disciplinary associations to shape and support community engaged scholarship.

Institutional policies that are silent on engagement discourage faculty from engaging local communities in their scholarly roles and alienate a new and more diverse generation of faculty members who increasingly identify as community engaged scholars. Rewarding this work will advance scholarship that has a broad social impact, assist communities in addressing social issues, and improve student achievement via active and collaborative learning. Community engaged scholarship, if rewarded, can enable higher education to achieve its vital civic and democratic aspirations.

Read more in Susan Sturm, Tim Eatman, John Saltmarsh, and Adam Bush, "Full Participation: Building the Architecture for Diversity and Public Engagement in Higher Education," *Imagining America* 17 (2011); John Saltmarsh and Matthew Hartley, "The Inheritance of Next Generation Engagement Scholars," in *Publicly Engaged Scholars*, edited by Margaret Post, Elaine Ward, Nicholas Longo, and John Saltmarsh (Stylus Publishing, 2016); and Lori Vogelgesang, Nida Denson, and Uma Jayakumar, "What Determines Faculty-Engaged Scholarship?" *Review of Higher Education* 33, no. 4 (2010): 437-472.