

Forum Notes for February 5: Integrating your Work

Speakers: John McLaughlin (Huxley), Rebekah Paci-Green (Huxley), Francisco Rios (Woodring)

Travis Tennesen – Introduction

How can our lives as teachers, researchers, and activists all integrate together? Thoughts from Sherril B. Gelmon and co-authors, from the article Community-Engaged Scholarship in the Academy: an Action Agenda:

Over the past decade or more, national commissions, professional associations, and accrediting and funding agencies have identified community engagement as a core mission of higher education. Students, faculty, and community partners all benefit from moving the classroom to the community (and back again). Community-engaged research has also gained recognition as a legitimate approach to producing and mobilizing knowledge. Yet as changes to curricula and research within programs or institutions (and in some cases across disciplines or clusters of disciplines) have moved forward, there has not been similar progress in reforming definitions of scholarship to include multiple forms of research that engage the community and have a meaningful impact on it. Universities, the great majority of which are publicly supported to a greater or lesser extent, are increasingly expected to play a leadership role in addressing problems of the larger community by engaging with practitioners outside of the academy. The faculty involved apply their expertise to real world problems and collaborate with peers in other sectors, who also bring their knowledge and wisdom to the table, in order to generate, disseminate, and apply new knowledge – a practice known as community-engaged scholarship (CES). CES combines the principles of community engagement with accepted standards of scholarship. Community engagement entails the application of institutional resources to solve problems facing communities through collaboration with those communities. This engagement educates students for democratic citizenship, mobilizes multiple forms of knowledge, and leverages the capacities of all the participants to improve community well-being. Community engagement in and of itself is not necessarily scholarship. That term is reserved for research and scholarship that uses a scholarly approach, is grounded in work that has come before, and is documented through products that can be disseminated and subjected to critique by peers from a variety of contexts. Most universities do not have in place the incentives and supports needed for faculty to work in this way. In particular, systems in place at most universities for faculty recruitment and career advancement have not kept pace with faculty roles in and with communities. Faculty are generally rewarded more for publishing a paper in an academic journal or receiving grant funding than for contributing to meaningful societal change. Yet some institutions are role models in making the changes that enable this work. In the sections that follow, we consider the challenges faculty, community partners, and institutions face in conducting engaged scholarship and describe opportunities for improvement and promising practices.

Rebekah Paci-Green

Some years during her career have felt super effective and some haven't. Sometimes things feel like they are totally in sync, everything is in focus, and teaching and research are all connected. This is currently a season in Rebekah's career where everything is in sync.

In order to make it happen, Rebekah had to throw out the unit evaluation plan; although it might be considered academic suicide by some, the work she is doing now is important, necessary, and if it isn't valued by Western this isn't the right institution for her.

The journey towards the current place where work feels balance started with a project in Turkey working on squatter settlements and earthquake safety. She heard from her partners on the ground that what they really wanted was help with school disaster preparation management and related safety plans. Because Rebekah listened to the community and they directed her in the work she was doing, that work has started a global movement. Because of the scope, she can't do it alone, so students are pulled into her work from a variety of disciplines.

John McLaughlin

This is an issue that John has been wrestling with for years. Some people say to wait to fully integrate your community engagement with your research and teaching until after you have tenure, to ensure you are meeting the tenure and promotion requirements. What we need to do is change the T and P system to include community engagement, as other institutions have done. We need to work as an institution, and in our own fields to elevate and encourage and acknowledge community engagement as an important part of scholarly work.

As an institution we have just been through an intense season of budget cuts. As an institution, we should serve societal needs, and this is one way we can help pay for the programs we offer, if they are directly meeting needs of the community.

In the past, John has helped his students get involved in the community by paying them as field assistants and by getting them credit. Students love to make an impact through their courses, so a little added benefit can go a long way.

Francisco Rios

These are questions of identity: why we do/value/prioritize what we do. If you see your research identity as a person transforming communities, you will approach research differently. It's okay for intellectuals to see and engage in communities. It makes our work look different when the community plays a central role.

At UC San Marco, Francisco helped to construct a teacher education program from the ground up. Every aspect of the process was an intellectual exercise. They talked to the community about what teachers in the 21st century should look like. And they wrote papers constantly throughout the process, to document and reflect and share what they were doing.

Papers and research have come out of every aspect of Francisco's career, from advising to relationships, new programs, working with first generation or marginalized students. When in Wyoming they learned that a local tribal community did not trust academics because of past violations and bad experiences. They created protocols around research in order to rebuild trust: they started with the community and answered the questions they asked. The communities created their own IRB processes for faculty to

complete. They always brought their research to the community first for interpretation, and first for presenting it before it was published. When research happens this way it puts the community first, but it does become a longer process.

Follow up thoughts:

James Loucky: all presenters felt that the work we do should start with the community. We need the community to lead us.

Doug Banner: When working on an education reform project in Aruba he learned that 70% of what we bring is generalizable, 30% needs to come from the community. Right now he is teaching people how to do their own community action research, so they have the tools to conduct the research themselves, and he can take on more of a mentorship role instead.

Rebekah Paci-Green: Rebekah feels that she has been more rigorous in her field and published more when her work has been directed by the community instead of just her own interests.

John McLaughlin: Rigor is important, and in the Whatcom County Planning Office, they must be able to defend what they do in court, which has stiffer requirements than the peer reviewed process. The real challenge: letting go of our control of the questions we ask. By letting the community direct the research questions we ask, it truly becomes meaningful.

Todd Haskell: Sometimes it feels like, as an institution, we are moving a lot, but I wonder if we aren't really moving forward as much as we think we are. The Academy values control over care, masculinity over femininity, individuality over communal values, and change is very slow coming.

Jennifer Hine: Seeing the Academy as the place for "intellectuals," makes it seem like the community is not the place for them. Asset based thinking is needed, so campuses see the knowledge and skills and experience that the community is bringing to the table.

James Loucky: We must empower communities to speak, teach, and be heard, by listening to them.

Travis Tennesen: Every interesting research question came from wandering around.