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Brief 20: Graduate Education and Civic Engagement

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Graduate Education and Civic Engagement

By

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Across the country, new attention is being paid to graduate education and civic engagement (Applegate, 2002; Bloomfield, 2006). For decades college campuses have worked diligently to connect undergraduate academic study with public service in order to enhance learning and meet community needs, a connection often referred to as service-learning or civic engagement. Given that over 1,000 institutions have joined Campus Compact, a national organization of college presidents and institutions committed to this work (www.campuscompact.org), the widespread success of the service-learning movement is undeniable. As a further testament, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching now has a classification focused solely on community engagement (www.carnegiefoundation.org/classifications/index).

While graduate schools that prepare students for service-oriented professions such as law, medicine, and social work have long traditions of engaging students in clinics and other forms of experiential learning, graduate education overall has not been a major focus of the civic engagement movement (Stanton & Wagner, 2006). There are many reasons for this. For one, research universities, which train the majority of future faculty, maintain a fervid commitment to

basic (as opposed to applied) research. Similarly, much learning occurs in small seminars, between a mentor and protégé, and/or independently, and the knowledge learned is highly specialized and theoretical (Austin & McDaniels, in press). As such, graduate faculty often do not see connections between their highly specialized teaching and research and public concerns. Sustaining reciprocal partnerships with community or public organizations also requires significant time, effort, and skill on the part of campus faculty and staff. Moreover, research and doctoral programs reward faculty more for publications and external grant funding than for innovative teaching or community-based research in public settings. Perhaps most important, the majority of graduate programs do not prepare future faculty to see engagement as a way of teaching and discovering in their discipline, or to see the knowledge they are gaining as having a public purpose (O'Meara, 2006). These graduate students often go on to become faculty, and the cycle continues.

This cycle of disengagement diminishes the potential vitality of graduate education (Applegate, 2002; Bloomfield, 2006; Stanton & Wagner, 2006). Many masters and doctoral students come to graduate school wanting to continue engagement with communities or issues that they were involved with during their undergraduate years. Many of these students were inspired to enter their future professions because of such commitments and do not want the knowledge they acquire to be isolated from the contexts in which it might be used and improved (Golde & Dore, 2001; Golde & Walker, 2006). When graduate programs are not engaged with external constituencies, students are less likely to learn community-based research methodologies that are important to understanding public problems (Strand et al, 2003). By contrast, the intentional integration of service-learning and community-based research into graduate programs can help students learn important skills in a real-world context and develop a professional orientation that values this type of work, while allowing researchers and teachers to transcend textbooks. This is not to say that all civic engagement in graduate education will accomplish these goals; as undergraduate programs have learned, the ways in which service learning gets implemented is crucial to its success. If not applied purposefully, graduate civic-engagement programs can be damaging to communities or become meaningless busy work for students. Attention must be given to why, how, and where civic engagement is integrated into the work of graduate students and faculty.

Graduate education, however, seems to be the next frontier of the service-learning and civic-engagement movements. National service-learning organizations, disciplinary associations, and

individual campuses and departments are beginning to talk about how to structure graduate programs in ways that engage students in service-learning and community-based research (Bloomfield, 2006a, 2006b; O'Meara, 2006; Stanton & Wagner, 2006).

In February 2006, the University of Minnesota held a forum on civic engagement and graduate education, co-sponsored by the Office for Public Engagement, and Campus Compact (www.academic2.umn.edu/grad_ed/index.htm). Victor Bloomfield, Associate Vice President for Public Engagement at the University of Minnesota, authored a position paper, *Civic Engagement and Graduate Education: Ten Principles and Five Conclusions*, that served as a basis for discussion for a March 2006 Wingspread Conference (www.johnsonfdn.org/06conferences.html). Both of these meetings brought national leaders in graduate education and civic engagement together to develop strategies for creating infrastructure and support for graduate civic engagement across disciplines.

In April 2006, California Campus Compact hosted a *Symposium on Civic Engagement and Graduate Education* to gather California campuses together to analyze the current state of civic engagement, service-learning and community-responsive research at the graduate level (www.cacampuscompact.org). This symposium included sessions in which campuses discussed model programs for integrating engagement into teaching, research, and institutional initiatives and collaboratives. Two major themes emerged. The first theme was the interest in civic engagement among graduate students from disciplines as diverse as math, health, and law. These graduate students are already involved in civic engagement, whether it is integrated into their programs or not, and they very much want their faculty to "catch up" and integrate engagement opportunities into their programs. Several students -- absent faculty interest -- were in fact initiating community engagement into their departments themselves. Second, many models of graduate programs that are helping students learn professional skills, acquire knowledge in their disciplines, and develop a professional orientation through engagement with community organizations were showcased at the conference. One such program was the UCSF Community Partnership Resource Center (CPRC), a family and community medicine initiative designed to facilitate partnership activities between UCSF and local communities. The Community Partnership Resource Center involved faculty and graduate students in project development, implementation and evaluation, community-based participatory research, and social advocacy (www.familymedicine.medschool.ucsf.edu/community_service/cprc).

While not present at the conference, another model discussed was a University of Texas effort to develop "citizen-scholars" through its Intellectual Entrepreneurship Program (webspace.utexas.edu/cherwitz/www/ie). Other models from legal and medical clinics were discussed, as well as standards that can be used to construct programs in other disciplines.

Graduate education and civic engagement, however, will not progress without commitment from disciplinary associations, as these organizations set standards, priorities and direction for faculty and graduate work in most disciplines (Golde & Walker, 2006). Luckily, many disciplinary associations have realized the benefits that will accrue to their fields by integrating civic engagement. For example, many disciplinary associations now have special interest groups or initiatives that focus on the public aspects of their work: Historians do so through the field of "public history" and a Task Force on Public History (see www.historians.org/governance/tfph/TFPHreport.htm); anthropologists have supported civic purposes through public anthropology (www.publicanthropology.org); and the American Sociology Association's 99th annual conference focused on public sociology (www.asanet.org). Likewise efforts in teacher education can be found at www.fasite.org for the Florida Association for Service-Learning in Teacher Education and efforts in Engineering at www.engr.psu.edu/IJSCLE for the International Journal for Service-Learning in Engineering. While not every one of these disciplinary efforts is synonymous with "civic engagement," they nonetheless signify that disciplines are beginning to recognize public purposes within their fields and to acknowledge community-based research as legitimate scholarship. This suggests natural allies for those who want to more closely align disciplines with community engagement.

As graduate program directors, deans, department chairs, and faculty consider the new movement to integrate civic engagement into graduate education, several key questions might help guide campus efforts. I locate these questions at the department level because while campus-wide initiatives provide needed leadership and are important symbolically, it is within individual departments that most doctoral education occurs (Austin & McDaniels, in press; CID, 2006; Golde & Walker, 2006).

Questions for departmental discussion:

What are the strengths of our doctoral program and what do we need to reform in order to meet our goals?

Within the culture of research and doctoral universities, faculties rarely get a chance to discuss basic program goals and effectiveness. Yet engagement cannot be successfully integrated into graduate programs without some sense of what the curriculum (formal or informal) is trying to accomplish and where engagement might play a part. The Carnegie Initiative on the Doctorate is a great starting place for this discussion, as they outline five developmental trajectories that might help students build independence, creativity, capacity, confidence, and responsibility (CID, 2006). While most programs will no doubt start with the concrete knowledge they want students to learn and then move on to skills and values/orientations (Austin & McDaniels, in press), the CID's birds eye view of the ultimate goals of doctoral education might inspire useful visioning within specific programs.

Who are logical community or public partners for our graduate program? If we were to partner intentionally with one organization or agency outside the institution, who would it be and why? What might we do together?

The University of Maryland Law School's website lists its various legal clinics as well as its "community partners," making a statement that it has developed long-term relationships with agencies that are core to its programs. Discussion of community partners will undoubtedly encourage discussion of how the knowledge produced within a department is useful to those outside, and the benefits and challenges of pursuing long-term relationships with community partners (without institutional reward systems and policies encouraging faculty to do so). Nonetheless, if those facilitating these conversations emerged with even one potential community partner and permission to explore potential collaborations with that organization, this would be a major step forward.

Where are the opportunities within our program where civic engagement might enhance, if not greatly improve student learning?

Socialization theory suggests that there are many critical periods within a doctoral program when engagement might be integrated (O'Meara, 2006). Whether a department chooses to take first or second steps by integrating engagement into an introductory course, practicum, an upper elective, research courses, or the comprehensive exam process, is less important than the conversation which ensues in the process. Within this discussion, questions of whether engagement should be an option or required within a core course, whether engagement-friendly research methods are offered, and how individual faculty might mentor students in this work will

likely emerge. However, this type of conversation about each stage of the doctoral process and how engagement might be introduced can only improve doctoral programs, regardless of the degree to which engagement is embraced by faculty.

What does it mean to be a "public scholar" within the context of our discipline? What types of work are we doing, or might we do, to introduce our students to the public role of a scholar?

This question in many ways underscores the others because it defines what faculty within a graduate program feel the public role of scholars in their discipline should be, if any, and then asks how they might go about modeling that behavior to students, or creating opportunities for them to experience that role firsthand. Many faculty will not be able to answer this question, having experienced little mentoring in engagement themselves. Engaged senior faculty may take a leadership role here, introducing some of their work and concepts of engagement in their discipline to their colleagues. Either way, by grappling with this question, they might bring the conversation to the attention of the next generation of scholars, many of whom will break new ground in redefining engaged scholarship in the years to come.

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KerryAnn has a long-time connection to NERCHE, having written two working papers and worked on several projects over the years. Most recently, she developed NERCHE Brief # 20: "Graduate Education and Civic Engagement." She is currently working alongside Alan Bloomgarden of Smith College on a research project examining the work and professional lives of engaged faculty using information on Lynton Award nominees and award winners. She is also collaborating with John Saltmarsh, Dwight Giles and several others on a new project around the scholarship of engagement. KerryAnn received her B.A. in English from Loyola College, her M.A. in Higher Education from Ohio State University, and her Ph.D. in Education Policy from the University of Maryland.