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Community-Engaged Teaching: Opportunities and Challenges for Graduate Instructors

Stacy Bluth

North Carolina State University

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CHAPTER 14.

COMMUNITY-ENGAGED TEACHING: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR GRADUATE INSTRUCTORS

STACY BLUTH

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Community-engaged teaching can help alleviate the lack of relevance and isolation many graduate students experience.
- Graduate instructors using community-engaged teaching need to be particularly mindful of how they can find mentors, build equitable partnerships, and transform their community-engaged teaching into scholarship.

Every spring, our department asks doctoral students to document our progress on a variety of milestones, including coursework, preliminary exams, dissertation research, conference presentations, and journal publications. I have always been disappointed that we are not asked to reflect on our teaching—an important responsibility that funds many of our assistantships, impacts the undergraduate students entrusted to our care, and often leads to increased employability in today’s world of dwindling tenure-track faculty positions.

But, to be honest, the absence of a teaching-related question most likely saves me considerable frustration and further disappointment. If asked to discuss my teaching, I would have to explain that I made the decision to teach a community-engaged course that provides undergraduate students with “real-world experiences” by connecting the classroom to the community. Even though I am relatively new to the community-engaged teaching journey, I have had conversations with enough faculty, staff, and peers across disciplines and other universities to know that the phrase “community-engaged” typically elicits one of three discouraging responses.

At best, my mention of community engagement is met with tempered curiosity. Although individuals with this mindset may empathize with my desire to better connect universities and communities, they typically lack the engaged scholarship and pedagogical training and experience to provide mentorship, and are often unable to point me toward appropriate resources and support. They caution me about the challenges of going it alone, especially as a graduate student. A second group of individuals is less optimistic about community-engaged teaching's potential for positive impact. This group has heard horror stories, both anecdotally and in the literature, about community engagement's inadvertent role in the social reproduction of inequality. They worry that community-engaged courses place additional burdens on already strained and under-resourced nonprofit organizations, advancing students' personal development and resumes through the exploitation of those less privileged. The final, and most vocal, position is that community-engaged teaching will take too much of my time and distract me from progressing towards my degree and attaining the conventional pure science research experiences and publications that are the currency of careers in higher education.

Perhaps the most difficult aspect to accept of these different responses is that there is some truth in each of them. Extensive research clearly demonstrates that even the most seasoned faculty teaching community-engaged courses frequently unwittingly reinforce racial stereotypes and preserve race and social class inequality (Butin, 2007; Mitchell et al., 2012) and face numerous obstacles, including increased workloads, limited resources, and a lack of recognition and rewards in traditional tenure and promotion processes (Blanchard & Furco, 2021; Holtzman & Meaning, 2015; Morton et al., 2019).

Given the struggles that experienced faculty face when implementing community-engaged teaching, why should graduate students, who have far less experience, multiple demands like coursework and dissertations, and less powerful positions in the higher education landscape, even consider attempting to teach using this approach? The significance of this question, and its underlying contradictions, are the inspiration for this chapter. In the following pages, I reflect on my experiences as a graduate instructor teaching a community-engaged course at a large public research university. I begin with a brief overview of community-engaged teaching, highlighting the common principles of this approach. Then, I explore the opportunities for graduate instructors teaching community-engaged courses, describing how integrating community engagement into teaching can mitigate some of the common critiques of contemporary graduate education. Finally, I return to the concerns I mentioned previously, examining several challenges I grappled with and providing practical strategies and resources for graduate students who are teaching, or are considering teaching, community-engaged courses. While my experiences are singular, I hope this chapter will offer solidarity to those of us already teaching community-engaged courses and will encourage more graduate instructors to add community-engaged teaching to their developing toolkits.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY-ENGAGED TEACHING?

Community-engaged teaching gained momentum in the 1980s as a powerful strategy that could fulfill higher education's public mission and provide benefits to a wide variety of stakeholders including universities, faculty, students, and communities (Post et al., 2016; Welch & Plaxton-Moore, 2019). In the past several years, increasingly complex social problems (e.g. the COVID-19 pandemic, racial injustice, and the environment), the privatization of social welfare, and a languishing civil society have made it even more important for contemporary universities to rely on strategies like community-engaged teaching to demonstrate their value and relevance to society (Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011).

As community-engaged teaching has increased in popularity across colleges and universities, academic disciplines, and communities, the terms, theories, and specific activities associated with this approach also have grown. The resulting anarchy of terms unfortunately creates considerable confusion, particularly for individuals new to community engagement. At its essence, community-engaged teaching is a pedagogy, or a method of teaching and learning, that provides students “real-world experiences” by connecting classrooms and communities (Berard & Ravelli, 2021). Instructors, students, and community partners utilizing community engagement face a continuum of choices ranging from the focus (e.g. civic, disciplinary, competency, or project) to the form (e.g. direct service, community-based research, policy/politics, philanthropy, activism, or social entrepreneurship)¹.

Although community-engaged teaching comes in many shapes and sizes, several common principles underpin this approach. By definition, community-engaged courses connect the classroom to local, regional/state, national, or global communities. Instructors and students in these courses often partner with neighborhoods, schools, nonprofit organizations, government agencies, and other external entities. And, unlike student volunteer and co-curricular experiences, community-engaged courses explicitly tie the formal learning objectives of the course to community involvement.

Community-engaged courses also disrupt traditional educational models of “banking” where students are viewed as recipients of expert knowledge (Freire, 1996) and instead emphasize the knowledge that students co-create with their instructors, peers, and community members (Eatman, 2012). Finally, in recent years, practitioners and scholars have increasingly emphasized that community-engaged teaching must involve mutually beneficial, reciprocal partnerships (Blanchard & Furco, 2021; Carnegie Foundation, n.d.). Community-engaged courses strive to escape the conventional perception of higher education institutions as ivory towers that provide a one-way flow of expertise to communities by instead prioritizing authentic relationships in which universities are no longer doing “to” but rather “with” communities.

GRADUATE INSTRUCTORS AND ENGAGED TEACHING

A growing body of research documents faculty members’ experiences with community- engaged teaching (e.g., Blanchard & Furco, 2021; Jameson, et al., 2012) as well as graduate students’ involvement as students in engaged courses (e.g., Levkoe et al., 2020; Ylitalo & Meyer, 2019); however, little is known about graduate instructors’ lived experiences teaching community-engaged courses. Neither fully instructor nor fully student, graduate instructors occupy a unique, in-between position in the power dynamics and hierarchy of higher education (Hubrig et al., 2017; Lac & Fine, 2018). In addition, the structural features of graduate education, including lack of substantial pedagogical training, unpredictable teaching schedules, funding constraints, and multiple competing demands on time, further shape the opportunities and challenges facing graduate instructors interested in developing and teaching community-engaged courses. Before turning to an exploration of the opportunities and challenges I have encountered as a graduate instructor teaching a community-engaged course, I provide a brief overview of the perspective that informs my reflection.

1. See Welch & Plaxton-Moore (2019), especially chapter 3, and Blanchard & Furco (2021) for helpful overviews of the common foci, forms, and frameworks associated with community engagement.

Perspective of a Community-Engaged Graduate Instructor and Researcher

My community-engaged experience did not begin in higher education but rather in the community. Prior to pursuing my PhD, I taught at an under-resourced K-8 school and led two youth-serving nonprofit organizations. I launched into these experiences passionate about educational equity and the role that education can play in ending poverty. However, I quickly discovered even more curiosity and passion about something else—the intentions, motivations, actions, and impact of the many everyday citizens who volunteered their time and money to the schools and nonprofit organizations I worked with. In each of my community experiences, local university students and faculty were important sources of volunteers. Sometimes their support was helpful, but many times their involvement created headaches. I often lamented not having enough time, energy, or insight into higher education to build stronger, more reciprocal, and mutually beneficial partnerships. It struck me as a missed opportunity for everyone.

My desire to better understand what motivates universities and their students to “do good” and the organizational conditions that support more equitable partnerships that can lead to social change led me to pursue my PhD in sociology. The university I attend is a large public research university that is also a land grant institution, providing an interesting backdrop for exploring university-community relationships. As a current doctoral student, I am fortunate to have several opportunities to learn about and practice better ways to build bridges between universities and their communities.

The primary experience that I rely upon in this chapter is my role as a graduate instructor for an introductory-level sociology course. The course fulfills the university’s general education diversity requirement and draws students from a wide range of academic disciplines and backgrounds. When I decided to embrace community-engaged teaching, my section became the first and only community-engaged section of the course. Students are notified of this pedagogical approach in the course description.

My students and I partner with a statewide nonprofit organization that supports young adults with histories in the substitute care system (e.g., foster care and kinship placements). The organization trains the young adults to advocate for changes in local and state policies that affect the resources and support available to teens and young adults in the foster care system. The organization also holds events and conferences to build the young peoples’ life skills and support networks to help them successfully transition to adulthood.

Although I had a prior relationship and familiarity with the organization from my time working in the community, the university-community partnership we established was a new one. The organization’s staff and youth leadership team asked my class to help evaluate the effectiveness of their events and conferences. As part of this evaluation project, we have worked with the organization to complete a number of tasks including designing a survey, analyzing survey results, conducting focus groups and observations, and presenting results. This experience allows my students—often first year students—to gain hands-on experience in sociological research methods and the type of work that an applied sociologist might do. In addition, the partnership allows students to apply the sociological principles they are learning in the classroom, specifically what sociology teaches us about using power and inequality as a lens to reflect critically on our own actions and experiences, in the community partnership.

In addition to teaching a community-engaged course, I also work with the university's outreach and engagement office. This role involves implementing a new software platform to collect information about faculty and staff engagement and provides the opportunity to listen to faculty, staff, and graduate students across many academic disciplines discuss the details of their engaged scholarship. A final experience that shapes my reflections in this chapter is my dissertation research, which focuses on evaluating a specific university-community partnership through the lens of the often-overlooked community partners.

Opportunities: Overcoming the Lack of Relevance and Isolation in Graduate Education

When scholars discuss the opportunities proffered by community-engaged teaching, they often focus on the welcome benefits that undergraduate students taking these courses enjoy. Extensive evidence confirms community-engaged teaching is a high-impact educational practice that improves academic learning (Astin et al., 2000; Jameson et al., 2013; Kilgo et al., 2015), boosts undergraduate graduation and retention rates (Astin & Sax, 1998; Roose et al., 1997), promotes civic engagement and social responsibility (Brownell & Swanar, 2010; Engberg & Fox, 2011; Hironimus-Wendt & Wallace, 2009; Kezar & Rhoads, 2001; Simons & Clearly 2006), and increases awareness of diversity and multicultural competence (Einfeld & Collins, 2008; Jones & Abes, 2004).

These positive student outcomes present a compelling reason for many of us who are passionate about teaching to consider community engagement. Yet, given the constraints and demands facing graduate instructors, more evidence and resources may be needed to encourage graduate students to design a community-engaged course. In this section, however, my goal is to generate a different type of conversation—one about the benefits of teaching a community-engaged course that are *unique* to the graduate students who teach them. Specifically, I reflect on how my community-engaged teaching has helped me overcome two of the most commonly cited critiques of contemporary graduate training: lack of relevance and isolation.

Relevance

My graduate school application essay began boldly with, “I do not want to be a tenure track faculty member.” I knew that stating my intention for a less traditional career pathway from the onset was a risk. However, for me, it was a risk worth taking. I trusted that if the program accepted me with a clear understanding of my intentions, then they were willing, and hopefully well-equipped, to support me in this journey.

I quickly learned that my goals were not unique. Today's graduate students often have significant prior undergraduate and personal service experience and a desire to make the world a better place (Beckman & Brandenberger, 2009; Stanton & Wagner, 2006). Marginalized students, in particular, express strong interest in connecting their research to the communities and issues they care about (Colbeck & Wharton-Michael, 2006; Jaeger & Haley, 2016; O'Meara, 2008). In addition, for those graduate students who do not aspire to tenure track faculty positions, the odds are not good. Recent studies reveal that only 30% of doctoral graduates will secure tenure track positions, with most graduate students pursuing teaching faculty positions or nonacademic careers (Cassuto & Weisbuch, 2021; Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2013). Graduates who do secure tenure track positions will likely still feel pressure to share their scholarship with wider external

audiences as universities encounter increasing pressure to demonstrate their value and relevance through broader impacts (Post et al., 2016).

Herein lies the disconnect. Today's graduate students either want, or will need, skills and experiences that prepare them to be successful in non-academic circles, but graduate programs continue to prepare students by emphasizing pure research that focuses on scientific theory and fundamental knowledge and elevating the tenure track faculty position as the only legitimate goal (Cassuto & Weisbuch, 2021). This disconnect in contemporary graduate education has important short- and long-term consequences, affecting everything from graduate students' economic outcomes to their mental health.

I learned firsthand about these competing dynamics when I entered graduate school. Within a few months, I became frustrated with how theoretical and disconnected my coursework was to the "real world." I began exploring different ways to make my graduate experience more relevant to both my personal and professional goals. When I discovered community-engaged teaching, I was immediately drawn to it as a method that promised an opportunity to bridge my nonprofit and higher education experiences. But, perhaps most importantly, I felt enabled to push forward because no one said "no." Since teaching is undervalued in graduate education and typically seen as a means to an end, I was able to take advantage of this institutional ambivalence to learn and hone my community engagement skills. As long as I stayed on the pure research pathway with my course assignments and dissertation, I felt I could use my teaching to integrate less conventional approaches.

Community-engaged teaching quickly became my conduit for integrating more relevance and meaning into my graduate education. I find tremendous personal fulfillment in knowing I am playing a role, even if it is a small one, in helping my students use sociology to be more thoughtful about how they want to make a difference in the world. I enjoy taking the complex, and often abstract, theories and methods I am learning in my graduate education and partnering with my students and our community partner to figure out how to apply these in ways that help real people, in real organizations, in real time. And, in navigating this precarious and often messy space between academia and community, I am learning new skills that strengthen my ability to build partnerships that honor the integrity of good scientific research while also respecting the needs of communities.

These new skills hopefully benefit my students and our community partner as well as foster opportunities for me to obtain a job that I actually want, and that exists, after finishing my dissertation. Through my community-engaged teaching, I have learned about and built strong connections with several nonprofit and government agencies. When I meet with the staff at these organizations, they never ask me about my dissertation research. Instead, they are curious about what I have learned working in and with communities. Like many graduate students, these individuals are eager to find ways to better connect their communities with universities. I also have used the skills I am gaining to pursue alternative career paths within high education. Through my community-engaged teaching, I discovered my university's outreach and engagement office. Working with this office has helped me supplement my assistantship and has taught me about the broader field of university-community engagement, unveiling a whole new set of careers within the domain of higher education as well as the external networks and organizations that support higher education engagement.

Isolation

In addition to more closely aligning my graduate education with my personal and professional goals, community-engaged teaching also helps me manage the isolation that many graduate students experience. The PhD journey is solitary, characterized by long hours reading, studying, and writing. Doctoral students must successfully navigate numerous rites of passage, often under constraints that bear little resemblance to the ones they will actually face in academic or non-academic careers, to prove they are an independent scholar. In many graduate programs, a pervading ethos of competitiveness and a lack of structured opportunities and time make it unlikely that graduate students will develop close peer relationships that alleviate the isolation, even without experiencing graduate school in a global pandemic. Unsurprisingly, research clearly documents the role this isolation plays in the mental health challenges and high drop-out rates that prevail in doctoral programs (Cassuto & Weisbuch, 2021).

Community-engaged teaching generates a valuable opportunity to overcome the solitary nature of graduate education because it emphasizes deep collaboration between instructors, students, and community members. In my experience, the relationships I have developed through community-engaged teaching have made graduate school much more enjoyable and less stressful. For example, at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic when I was teaching on Zoom, I felt particularly isolated. My students and I were wrestling, rather unsuccessfully, with a particularly messy methodological question for the survey we were designing for our community partner. We invited an individual from the community to attend class and help us better understand the organization's needs. After about five minutes on Zoom, our guest jokingly said, "Wow, you are way too serious in this class." She put on Bruno Mars 24K and started dancing. Before I knew it, all my students' Zoom squares were lighting up as they joined in the dancing and laughing. Experiences like this one, that happen because community-engaged teaching invites new people in and reframes our relationships with our students, have helped me break out of the academic bubble I find myself in far too frequently, leading to renewed energy and creativity as well as new friendships and support networks.

Community-engaged teaching also strengthens my own learning. While I have learned a lot from wonderful faculty teaching my graduate courses, I seem perpetually stuck at the bottom of Bloom's taxonomy in stages of "remembering" and "understanding." Community-engaged teaching requires me to continually "apply," "analyze," "evaluate," and "create," providing a deeper, more complex understanding of my academic discipline. In addition, community-engaged teaching strengthens my learning because it brings me into close and frequent contact with the lived experiences and knowledge of many voices that have been historically excluded and marginalized in higher education. These experiences ground me in a way that empirical studies and grand theory cannot, making me a better sociologist, engaged scholar, teacher, and community member.

Challenges: Mentorship, Equity, and Time to Degree

Community-engaged teaching provides graduate instructors with a powerful mechanism to mitigate the lack of relevance and isolation that prevails in many graduate programs, however, to realize these benefits, graduate instructors must successfully navigate numerous challenges. In this section, I focus on the three biggest obstacles I have encountered in my teaching and offer guidance on specific strategies and resources for others to overcome these challenges.

Mentorship

The lack of mentorship in community-engaged teaching for tenure track faculty is well documented (Blanchard & Furco, 2021; Welch & Plaxton-Moore, 2019). Graduate instructors, who are typically enrolled at universities that prioritize pure science and traditional career pathways, may be particularly disadvantaged when trying to identify potential community-engaged teaching mentors. The relatively short time frame of most graduate programs and competing demands, such as coursework and dissertations, create additional barriers for graduate instructors seeking community-engaged teaching mentors. However, mentors are critical for graduate students who are often new to teaching and community engagement and have limited institutional power. Mentors provide important emotional support, help graduate instructors learn the craft of community-engaged teaching, and offer valuable insight into how to successfully maneuver the institutional dynamics associated with teaching community-engaged courses.

My suggestion to overcome this challenge is simple—embrace your entrepreneurial spirit and start building a large support team now. Some graduate students may find themselves in a department, discipline, or university that champions community engagement. I did not. While people in my department were supportive, and sometimes even mildly encouraging of me teaching this way, no one else was teaching a community-engaged course. Fortunately, I had the valuable guidance of a tenured faculty member in the department who had taught community-engaged courses earlier in her career. She helped me figure out how to address the questions and concerns of other faculty and assisted me with the logistics of obtaining permission to teach the course and securing a cap on student enrollment.

While an ally within your department is incredibly helpful, you also will most likely need more people supporting you. My recommendation is to widen your circle. Does your university have a teaching center or, perhaps, an outreach and engagement office? These types of institutional resources can provide valuable tools such as professional development, grant opportunities, and community partner databases. In addition, you can search course catalogs, faculty profiles and websites, and university newsletters to identify other graduate students, faculty, and staff involved with community engagement. During your search, remember that community engagement comes in many different shapes and sizes. Often, the terms that other people use to describe their community engagement will not be the same as you use in your discipline.

Finally, I suggest looking outside of your university. Community-engaged teaching has evolved in the past several decades and a mature network of universities and networks supporting this approach now exists. I have relied heavily upon graduate student specific networks such as International Association for Research on Service-Learning & Community Engagement Graduate Student Network and groups like Campus Compact. These types of networks offer professional development, communities of practice, and other valuable resources. Most importantly, these networks will introduce you to a range of people across different disciplines and universities who are passionate about using their teaching and research to better connect universities and communities. Whether it is due to self-selection or socialization, my experience has been that because community-engaged professionals value relationships, they are quite welcoming and eager to serve as mentors for graduate students.

Equity

A number of practitioners and researchers have raised concerns about the potential role of community-engaged teaching in the reproduction of inequality. Studies document that community-engaged teaching can advance student personal development at the expense of those less privileged, as well as promote patronizing attitudes and actions, reinforce racial stereotypes, and encourage a deficits-based approach to community service that focuses on individual solutions instead of structural ones (Bocci, 2015; Becker & Paul, 2015; Butin, 2007; Mitchell, et al., 2012). Community-engaged teaching also may create additional burdens for marginalized students in these courses and already strained community organizations (da Cruz, 2017).

Over the past several decades, community engagement professionals have generated a robust dialogue about how to prevent these possible negative repercussions of community-engaged teaching. Best practices such as mutually beneficial, reciprocal relationships, shared decision making and resources, and long-term partnerships are now commonplace in universities' rhetoric about engagement (Blanchard & Furco, 2021). In addition, a smaller, but important, group of community engagement professionals advocate community-engaged teaching grounded in critical theory. Extending theories by bell hooks and other critical scholars, these professionals interpret community-engaged teaching as a revolutionary pedagogy that can promote critical consciousness and lead to social change when students are given opportunities to examine power and existing social inequalities (Mitchell, et al., 2012; Porfilio & Hickman, 2011).

As a sociologist with a background working in the community, I thought I could easily avoid many of the pitfalls that lead to the reproduction of inequality. I was wrong. The hardest part of my community-engaged teaching journey is struggling with issues related to inequality, power, and privilege. Developing the relationships and experiences that are necessary for truly equitable partnerships and positive transformational learning experiences for students takes time and skills that even the most accomplished faculty members often do not have. Graduate students, like myself, confront additional challenges because of our inexperience, competing demands, and unpredictable schedules. For many of us, basic best practices like a long-term relationship with a community organization are not even possible.

Looking back on my journey, I wish that someone had encouraged me to dip my toe into community-engaged teaching before jumping into the pool. I spent several semesters planning what I thought was going to be the "perfect" community-engaged course. I agonized over the details, scouring every community engagement journal and book for clues on how to build equitable partnerships and generate transformational learning experiences.

While these resources provided tremendous insight, they also were problematic. The case studies and theoretical frameworks intimidated me. Between my fear of failing to meet the best practices outlined in the literature, my training as a sociologist who theoretically should be particularly attune to inequality, and today's cancel culture, I was paralyzed. I did not realize that, like many other academic disciplines, community-engaged journals and books often exclude important, unpolished details and foiled attempts. In addition, I did not see terms like "transformational," "radical," and "critical" as the ideal types that they are. These terms provide us with important aspirational goals,

however, they often fall short of illuminating the complexities of the “real world” and the continuum of possibilities that actually exist.

Recognizing that what you read and hear about are often exemplars and ideal types—and that you often do not get to peek behind the curtain of published case studies—may help you gain the courage and confidence to try community-engaged teaching. Instead of waiting to design the perfect, immersive, integrated, transformational course for your students, you might consider starting with a single project or activity or perhaps connecting your course to a larger community-engaged campus initiative. You also might try new approaches and methods that better align with the demands you face as a graduate student as well as the specific context of your university, community, and students.

Undoubtedly, many of our efforts will fall short of equitable partnerships with truly transformational outcomes. However, it is important to see our community-engaged teaching as a craft that we improve over the course of our careers, and even lifetimes (Welch & Plaxton-Moore, 2019). Much of this learning comes from actually doing. By getting started with community-engaged teaching, we make our efforts public and invite important reflection among ourselves, our students, and our community partners. It is through this dialogue, and the practice of community-engaged teaching, that the real learning about how to create equitable university-community partnerships happens.

Time to Degree

If you are considering or already are teaching a community-engaged course, you may have heard some version of the following concern: community-engaged teaching will sidetrack you from progressing toward your degree and writing the peer reviewed articles that are the currency of higher education. Existing research corroborates this concern. Faculty teaching community-engaged courses encounter increased workloads due to the time demands associated with developing community partnerships and evaluating students’ progress in less traditional ways (Watson-Thompson, 2015). Because graduate students face tight funding and an increasingly competitive job market, faculty often advise graduate students to focus their limited time and resources on their research (Cantor, 2006) and encourage graduate students interested in community-engaged teaching to wait until they are further along in their careers (Krabill, 2012). However, treating community engagement as an add-on may be particularly problematic, further devaluing engaged scholarship and teaching within academia and lowering the likelihood that the next generation of faculty and administrators have the skills and experience necessary to fulfill higher education’s public responsibility (O’Meara & Jaeger, 2006).

While we cannot change the realities of higher education in the relatively short span of time we are in graduate school, we can find creative ways to increase the likelihood that what we care about, and invest considerable time in, counts toward important milestones like our dissertations and future jobs. One way you can turn your community-engaged teaching into something higher education values is by transforming it into scholarship with a written product that contributes to the creation of new knowledge and can be peer reviewed (Blanchard & Furco, 2021; Eatman, 2012). A growing number of community engagement resources outline how this process works—emphasizing an approach very similar to a traditional research project, including an initial grounding in the theories and conversations of the field you want to contribute to, a review of the relevant literature, and an identification of a gap in the knowledge that you want to address.

I resisted this advice my first semester teaching a community-engaged course. I worried that generating scholarship from my community-engaged teaching was self-serving and antithetical to the spirit of equity I wanted to create with my students and our community partner. However, I quickly realized that the warnings were accurate. If I want to graduate in a reasonable amount of time, obtain the credentials I need for the type of job I want, and continue to teach in this manner, I need to generate scholarly products from my community-engaged teaching. Community-engaged teaching opens up the potential to publish in a wide variety of fields including the scholarship of teaching and learning, the scholarship of engagement, and my academic discipline. In addition, and perhaps most importantly, I found that it is incredibly rewarding for me, my students, and our community partner to be a part of academic, as well as non-academic, conversations.

CONCLUSION

Community-engaged teaching is difficult under the best of circumstances. Graduate students, because of their inexperience, multiple demands on their time, and less powerful positions in the higher education landscape, must overcome additional hurdles. My experience teaching a community-engaged course at a large public research university highlights the challenges graduate instructors of community-engaged courses face, including finding mentors, developing equitable partnerships, and making progress toward their degree. However, my journey also illuminates the worthwhile benefits graduate instructors enjoy when they connect their classrooms to the community. Community-engaged teaching can play a meaningful role in overcoming the lack of relevance and isolation that characterize contemporary graduate education, and can open rewarding new career pathways that provide lasting benefits for the students in our classes, our universities, and the communities we care about.

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