



Engaging Higher Education: Purpose, Platforms, and Programs for Community Engagement

Welch, Marshall
Stylus Publishing, Llc., 2016

Book Review

Tags: civic engagement | community engagement | engaged teaching

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The standard perception of higher education in the United States is that it is only for the elite (or those middle-class folks who are willing to take out massive loans to pay for their education). However, the founding concept behind public higher education was to allow all who wish to earn an advanced degree the opportunity to do so. Obviously, the schema appears to have changed.

Financial considerations, admissions standards, and other limitations can produce obstacles to admission. One way to overcome these obstacles is the Community and Technical College system. This system has flourished as a result of offering skills-based training in a number of readily employable fields. Another way to surmount obstacles to higher education, and the one that is the subject of this review, is through community engagement. Community engagement occurs when an institution of higher learning opens its doors to the general public and seeks to partner with them in providing academic and professional training. Community can occur in one of two ways: the institution can seek partnerships with the public through campus events or community service, or the public can seek partnerships with the institution through fieldwork arrangements or training programs. Obviously, this can also be a two-way street where the institution and the community collaborate in the engagement process.

Welch's volume is based on the Carnegie Foundation's significant research study on existing community engagement offices at several major American universities and the conceptual writings on community engagement by John Saltmarsh. Welch outlines the purpose of, platforms for, and programs involved with community engagement. The strength of the volume is Welch's thorough analysis and systematizing of the Carnegie report. However, the volume

promises more than that; it promises to provide practical direction for how schools can connect with their community to implement these platforms and programs. This is where the volume falls short of expectations.

As mentioned previously, this book is quite voluminous when it comes to the analysis and quantification of the Carnegie study. And if it had simply stayed there, this would have been an insightful and thought-provoking volume that naturally leads to two other volumes by the same publisher that appear to be connected (*Publically Engaged Scholars* edited by Post, Ward, Longo, and Saltmarsh, and *Community Partner Guide to Campus Collaborations* by Cress, Stokamer, and Kaufman). However, the book also attempts to craft an implementation plan for community engagement. It waffles between institutions partnering with community liaisons to provide internships for human services or business students on the one hand and developing institution-based think-tanks that, through strategic partnerships, craft economic and political policy through instructor-student-sponsor relationships on the other. Ultimately, Welch's volume becomes a never-ending firehose that could lead to bloated institutions scrambling to keep their doors open or to anemic institutions beaten down by unnecessary feelings of academic and professional inferiority.

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