PUBLICLY ENGAGED SCHOLARS

Next-Generation Engagement and the Future of Higher Education

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Foreword by Timothy K. Eatman

Afterword by Peter Levine

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Community-engaged scholarship is rooted in and driven by our individual and intersecting identities, particularly three facets of an engaged scholar’s identity—the personal, professional, and the civic (Ward, 2010). Motivations for carrying out and sustaining a community-engaged scholarly agenda are found in other aspects of identity, such as gender, values, professional roles, and community and group affiliations. Our epistemological orientation (ways of knowing)—intuitive, disciplinary, relational, and connected—is another influencing factor in our work. Yet our approaches to engagement are not only about ways of knowing and our identities as scholars but are also reflective of the contexts within which we engage as teachers, scholars, and practitioners. The narratives of the next generation of engaged scholars convey the integration between our identities, roles, connectedness to place, and subsequent sense of responsibility to work in and with the communities in which we are connected. Table 7.1 demonstrates that the integration of our personal, professional, and civic identities aligned with our connection to place leads to the fuller development of our community-engaged scholarly identities (Ward, 2010).

In seeking an authentic integration of identity, roles, and commitment to place, the next generation of engaged scholars questions how they can realize their fullest potential as community-engaged scholars within higher education. For some, being able to accomplish this might mean working outside traditional structures of higher education. For others, realizing one’s fullest potential may mean straddling multiple, and sometimes new, roles within higher education. Our narratives explore questions of identity and how we navigate and negotiate our professional roles and personal commitments in
meaningful ways. Our individual and collective experiences demonstrate that community-engaged scholarship is a highly relational, integrated, and holistic practice that values diverse forms of inquiry and knowledge. Within this frame, the community-engaged scholar is but one individual in an extended web of relationships connected by common purpose to address and solve problems faced by the larger society.

The center of the engaged scholar’s identity is a scholarship that commands recognition of personal and communal values over the narrow, academic-centric self-interests of traditional scholarship. This newer form of scholarship recognizes community-based expertise and is propelled by a desire for all people to realize their highest potential. Through this recognition of community knowledge and expertise, engaged scholars and practitioner-scholars decenter the academy in the production of new knowledge that has public benefit. The next generation of engaged scholars and practitioner-scholars challenge the primacy of academic-centric epistemology further by collaborating with community members and students as coeducators and coresearchers in what were traditionally and solely the territory of the academy—the results of which call for a reconceptualization of what constitutes valid ways of knowing and inquiry (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1997; Naples, 2003; Rendón 2009).

The five stories we present in this chapter embody these democratic values as we use narratives and a collaborative process to inquire and understand our work. Our personal identity, desire for role integration, and epistemological and ontological values are evident in the following narratives, which characterize the connected, collaborative, and change-oriented community-engaged scholarly practice found throughout this part of the book.

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<tr>
<th>Facet of Community-Engaged Scholarly Identity</th>
<th>Aspects of Community-Engaged Scholarly Identity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>Gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, sexual orientation, values, personal epistemology (institutional, intuitive/emotional knowing)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>Roles: teaching, service, inquiry, academic epistemology (disciplinary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic</td>
<td>Community, church, group affiliations, participatory democracy, democratic inclusion, social justice, engaged epistemology (relational, collaborative/connected)</td>
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Emily M. Janke, Associate Professor and Founding Director of the Institute for Community and Economic Engagement, University of North Carolina at Greensboro

In my professional life, my primary appointment is as a chief community engagement administrator of a university-wide institute. I am also a scholar and tenure-track professor who teaches a course each semester. Most of all, perhaps, I am a boundary spanner. It defines where I find myself, as well as what I do. What it means is that I live within worlds that are seemingly distinct, and sometimes it feels as though I exist in that space in between them. These worlds are physical, cultural, intellectual, and personal.

I span both internal university boundaries as a scholar-administrator, as well as external boundaries as a community engagement scholar-administrator. In my professional roles and work I am not physically present in any one place, and there is no single role that truly supersedes the other.

A physical manifestation of this is that I have two offices and spend time off the campus speaking with community colleagues. I worry that, by being physically absent, my colleagues might believe that when I am out of sight, they are out of my mind. My community engagement scholars and administrator colleagues tell me they also experience this when they are working with community partners, leaving their departmental or administrative offices.

I am undeniably privileged to be a member among many cultures, many ways of thinking, many ways of acting and being a member of these different worlds. Certainly, the divide is never intellectual; I bring each of my roles into each area of work. My teaching is integral to my scholarship, and vice versa. My energy for my work is buoyed by the manifold interconnections. However, even though the roles and work are deeply connected, one is left to wonder if one’s colleagues accurately view it that way.

The gift that I have received as a boundary spanner is the ability to serve as a bridge bringing together worlds. This is my administrative imperative, and it is my scholarship. I must act to translate. Sometimes it helps to create new shared lexicons, so that these worlds can come together, if not with a common language and values, then at least with shared understanding about what motivates, what inspires, and what moves forward our individual and collective ideas, agendas, and values.

The challenge—and the opportunity, the gift—is to stand in the middle of these worlds and to hold them together, in tension, never forgetting that there is a give-and-take. On the whole, these relationships, together in a holistic way of being, fill me up as a scholar and educator and administrator and as a person.

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I used to see the space in between worlds, the boundary spanning, as being no (wo)man’s land. But I am increasingly seeing that others share an experience similar to mine. I see elements of my experience in the literature and echoed by colleagues. We converge on many important points. The first is Williams’s (2002) scholarship of organizational boundary spanners, which discusses the profiles of boundary spanners, including their skills, dispositions, and ability to build reciprocal relationships. He discusses the “balancing act between inclusion and separation, interdependence and autonomy” (p. 111). Boundary spanners are likely to experience loyalty to multiple professional organizations, sometimes resulting in shifting and/or divided loyalties—if they come to affiliate with one more than the other. It seems the tension I experience as a boundary spanner is a common, even normal, experience.

The second is Timothy’s (2012) qualitative and quantitative study of publicly engaged scholars, which identifies seven profiles of individuals who identify their commitments to community engagement from various roles and positions within the academy. Many next-generation engagement scholars are creating their own way of spanning identities and roles, whether as an administrator and faculty member, such as myself, or as a scholar-teacher, -artist, or -activist, among others. As Annie’s story [next in this chapter] indicates, many of us do not view our scholarly lives in terms of traditional disciplinary standards. As Rhoads, Kiyama, McCormick, and Quiroz’s (2008) discussion of new models of professionals in the academy suggest, the next generation of faculty may be looking not to “make it” in the academy, but rather to “remake” the academy (p. 215).

The third is Cathy’s (2012) large datasets on generational differences in attitudes toward academic employment, which provides further assurances that boundary spanning is likely to continue, not only for engagement but also across all facets of scholarly life and other lived experiences and personal values. I am a part of the Gen X demographic, and like the participants represented in the studies I, too, actively seek work that treads back and forth across, between, and among disciplines and roles. I, too, believe that excellent teaching, service, and research are connected. I, too, seek out a life of both the mind and the heart. I, too, make decisions about where I work, live, and do based on a collection of values, relationships, and priorities—not on prestige alone.

These collective stories and studies provide the kind of confidence that comes with identifying as one of many. Although within my own institution I sometimes feel as though I am relatively singular in the tensions I experience in my boundary-spanning roles, I know there are others like me near and far. I am affirmed that my experience is not singular; it is increasingly

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common. It is not the future; it is now. It is what we have come to expect for ourselves and our colleagues—a place where we can belong within, among, and between many worlds that not only matter, but also come closer together through our efforts and care.

Annie Miller, Doctoral Student and Adjunct Faculty

As I reflected upon how to frame my story of civically engaged scholarly practice and how to write such a narrative, I asked myself, What unifying theme could I identify in my work that led me to this place? What events in my life highlight this theme, and how do I explain my passion for the inclusion of community in higher education with the same enthusiasm that I demonstrate in person? While contemplating all of this, I read Tiny Beautiful Things by Cheryl Strayed (2012), which illuminated my struggle to reconcile writing a personal narrative with my advocacy for and immersion in the scholarship of engagement. What I took from this moving book is that in order to write this piece I must be completely, painfully, openly just who I am. I am not perfect at this work, and I am rarely willing to put my words to page to be examined by a public audience. Yet engaging jointly with our communities when inquiring about the world pushes each of us to recognize our biases, our perceptions, the reasons why we study what we do, and what drives our own curiosity. For me, this continues to be a glorious challenge of integration and connection. I find the discovery and application of knowledge the most vital and interesting work I know. This is not to say the pure pursuit of knowledge is not essential; it is simply that I am not built for the ways in which academia currently works in the discovery space.

The more I contemplate my story and how it relates to the future of the scholarship of public engagement, I think about how we often frame our lives around the roles we play. We are children, parents, friends, employees, employers, advocates, students, teachers, mentors, mentees, and so much more. I have segmented and defined my life playing these various roles. I became incredibly skilled at stepping on stage and playing my part until I moved along into the next role on the next stage.

Along this road I became very involved with restorative justice practices and eventually social justice theories. While becoming ever more passionate about creating positive change in our communities, I found the acting of each role exhausting. For me, this work, this identity that I grew into, became focused on merging or integrating my life into one comprehensive role—a life where I could go to work every day, come home, and interact with my friends and family as the same person, where I could have a thoughtful, singular voice of my own. I sought a place where I could be a speaker...
of my truth and to connect to the lives of others, which is what drew me to community engagement work in higher education.

Experiential education is necessary for the development of successful students and adults, and we need to be able to utilize scientific study (research, discovery, and inquiry) to address community problems in concert with stakeholders, community members, and those individuals directly impacted by the area of concern. It is meant to be work jointly conducted from the very outset with individuals beyond academia. The work is shared among the partners, and each person at the table is an expert in his or her own right. It is not about touting academic insights to a captive community audience; it is about working together with individuals from every perspective in the situation to question, enhance understanding, share knowledge, and apply informed judgments to the question at hand.

I suggest that we must consider integrating not only our identity with our work but also our bodies and our spirits as ways in which we find truth, knowledge, and science. I have come to believe that the most effective path to truly understanding and addressing the problems and issues in our society and applying knowledge to solve those problems is by connecting the experiences and feelings we each have with the knowledge we gain through scientific discovery and inquiry. Sometimes our intuition is the way in which we advance science. We get a notion that what was previously found about a phenomenon just does not sit right. We revisit it. We wonder why nobody else examined the phenomenon in the same way we seek to view it. Or we discover something so perplexing and different, it leads to a whole new field and exploration of how we previously thought about that phenomenon (I think about advances in genetic science, astronomy, and social science). The connection here is that our body and our feelings do influence how we practice science.

I would like to take this argument for integration a step further. The biggest issue I have faced in the academy is the structure of “disciplines.” Genuine community-based research and social justice action do not fit our current structures. As my heart grew in this work I found myself without a “home” department and therefore lacking professional credibility as a scholar. While there is some movement to have interdisciplinary studies degrees and problem-based work groups in some institutions, we have not gone far enough to realize the opportunity that could unfold when we view scientific discovery opportunities without the lens of disciplines. For example, in the work of combating human trafficking, we can utilize many different disciplines to create comprehensive interventions that respect the sociological and criminological roots of trafficking, the vulnerabilities of individuals that predispose them to risky lifestyles or poverty, and the political context of statutes.
that make prosecution of traffickers across jurisdictions difficult. Using clinical psychology, feminist and critical race theory, social work practices, political science, sociology, public administration, and sociology we are able to determine more effectively the prevalence of trafficking while also working with partners around the globe to fight it. In our current disciplinary structures, however, the necessary cross-pollination of disciplines is unrewarded and challenging. As I have moved to find my own personal identity, I have struggled to find a place in academia where people like myself are able to use integrative, creative, and collaborative skills to advance social justice.

Thus, what I want for higher education is not so fundamentally different than what I’ve been seeking in my own life: a way to connect my brain with my body and my soul. When our lives become so wholly disjointed and unincorporated that we find ourselves playing the roles we assume someone else expects, we lose not only our humanity but also our ability to sense what is right and what is wrong. I got lost in the performance and, in turn, lost my own internal sense of connection. This was my struggle: finding ways to stay connected to the work of my life, to that place in my gut that says what is right for me. Affirming what feels good is an ongoing project. Most recently I lost my own way in an academic program that turned out to be exactly wrong for me. In order to live up to what I thought the academy wanted, I toiled away for years until I imploded emotionally and physically. I thought I had been very clear in application materials and interviews about what I needed in a program, but once there, I quickly lost myself to the vast paranoia and pressure of a doctoral program isolated in ivy walls and to a disciplinary lens that refused to acknowledge or accept my unique set of skills and passion for social justice. I imagine my experience of “stepping out” is similar to the experience of many others. So much of higher education gets bogged down in power struggles, administrative red tape, and institutions fearful of change. To turn this around we require a fundamental shift in priorities. I argue for the scholarship of engagement beyond disciplinary boundaries not as a faculty member, a student, or an administrator, but just as a citizen who feels in all that they are, that inquiry, discovery, and ultimately knowledge are found when we come together from all walks of life and share what we know to be true.

Lina D. Dostilio, Director, Center for Community-Engaged Teaching and Research

As a first-generation college student I had a very uncomfortable and humbling academic experience when compared with my previous identity as
a “good student” in high school. In college, the first form of intellectual prowess is demonstrated by connecting ideas. Having had a very traditional educational experience I struggled to feel confident moving beyond memorization and recall to participation in dialogue and debate. I remember having peers seek out ways to connect with faculty beyond the classroom, such as cultivating research assistantships or forming guided reading groups. This was something that had never occurred to me; in my world, the totality of the student-teacher relationship existed in the classroom. Besides, these sorts of extracurricular activities were unlikely because of my work schedule. I remember feeling thoroughly inadequate.

Then I became a sociology major. It was a relatively small program in a huge university system. Within those classes, I encountered matters relevant to the public sphere—such as race, class, poverty, justice, social change, and culture—which were also topics that were germane to my life experience. Eventually I also participated in community-based experiences that not only amplified these discussions, but also presented a mirror: I was exploring the same sort of social issues my family encountered while I was growing up.

As a result, I found a sense of agency and authority during our class discussions. While I spent the majority of my college experience feeling alien and having considerably fewer experiences from which to draw than my peers, I now felt connected to the material we were studying. I found faculty who became civic mentors to me. I was able to tap into a desire to change particular social conditions—a desire I had prior to college—but now had a new set of civic skills, academic language, and broader worldview from which to do so.

Perhaps feeling alien to its culture and norms, I acquired a critical stance from which I saw higher education, and some might question my choice to work within higher education, given that my first experience with it was so uncomfortable. Yet I have a facilitative belief that underlies my interest in working in postsecondary education: I believe that it is one of the most powerful levers we have in forming an engaged citizenry equipped to address social injustices. Higher education afforded me unparalleled opportunities for social mobility and positioned me to do the work necessary to alleviate the justice issues that face my family and loved ones. I now feel compelled to extend these opportunities to others and to help higher education realize its public purpose.

Choosing to locate my work within higher education remains a struggle as I continue to feel that my presence and value are questioned. Over the past decade I experienced moments of institutional resistance to my presence as a younger female administrator, who has not sought a tenure-track faculty position, who champions the counternormative practice of
community-engaged scholarship. This has changed a bit as I’ve gained more experience and taken on roles such as teaching, sitting on dissertation committees, and collaboratively publishing with faculty colleagues. However, from my vantage as a center director, I still lack the power and influence of executive administrators, and not being a tenured faculty member, I do not have a vote on curricular matters or a formal path to provide input on the evaluation of colleagues’ work.

As a result, each time I return to my university after consulting with another campus, presenting at a conference, or working in the community, I have a sense of weariness. After having spent concentrated time with others who appreciate and corroborate my work, it is an abrupt and decentering transition to an experience that is so marked by friction. The fluidity with which I could do my work is hampered by having to continually establish the legitimacy of community-engaged scholarship and myself as an institutional thought leader. The work is made more difficult by competing for scarce resources and attention. My ability to help others locate their work in and with communities is obstructed by the normative expectations the academy has of faculty and students in how higher education delimits their workloads and worthwhile pursuits. And, perhaps most frustratingly, higher education has begun to acknowledge particular student experiences or teaching methods that are considered “high impact” (Kuh, 2008), and although being able to identify and offer high-quality learning experiences is crucial, there is an institutional tendency to expediently fit engagement into a set of teaching methods or activities as a means to check off the community engagement box before moving onto other matters.

The structural and cultural resistance I describe makes it difficult for me to employ the approaches and tools a typical higher education leader might, given more normative foci, and leads me to adopt informal and relational strategies to organize institutional change, which I’ve come to regard as a blessing. I recognize that through the organic and community-based strategies I employ, I’ve engendered a good deal of respect among my faculty and community leader peers, am seen as a strong institutional change agent, and have become a thought partner to many within our faculty and administrative ranks who seek to implement community engagement within their teaching, research, program development, and curricular changes. I’ve become adept at utilizing data to tell the story of missed opportunities or to legitimate ways of engaging our larger communities that don’t fit into prescriptive boxes.

My choice to maintain a scholarly agenda is also outside of the norm for most administrators. As a result, my scholarship is not a main thrust of my administrative position, but is seen as a beneficial byproduct. Scholarship is
the work I do early in the morning or late at night after my child is asleep. It is not work I can do amid the chaotic phone calls, meetings, and e-mails of an engagement administrator. Yet, without research, my practice loses its focus and begins to cede the larger vision for why it exists. That larger vision, of leveraging higher education to address injustice, is compelling and sees me through to a stronger identity as a boundary spanner and community-oriented scholar.

Margaret A. Post and Elaine Ward

Our role as members of this book’s editorial team has positioned us differently than the other authors in this section. With Annie, Emily, and Lina, we developed the narrative approach used in this volume to illuminate the diversity and complexity of next-generation engagement. Over the months of writing, working with other authors, and reflecting on the process with our coeditors, John and Nick, we have occupied a unique space in bringing this book to life. Our dialogue and writing together continued to merge over time and is reflected in our joint narrative here.

Throughout our careers we have been doing collaborative engagement work before we had the language of service-learning, community-based practice, or public scholarship. Though our families of origin and our undergraduate experiences differ, we came to this work as community practitioners discouraged by widespread poverty and inequality, frustrated by a lack of agency to make change, and seeking a way to have a greater impact on the injustices we witnessed daily.

As we pursued graduate studies in different institutions and disciplines we each experienced an emergent and deepening understanding of our selves as engaged teachers, learners, researchers, and change agents. Our mentors had paved “nontraditional”—and in some cases, revolutionary—paths in higher education. Their example and encouragement influenced our growth as scholars and teachers. The writings of Paulo Freire, Jane Addams, bell hooks, Nancy Naples, Laura Rendón, Nadinne Cruz, and John Dewey inspired our commitments to cocreative teaching and research. We came to see our roles in higher education through multiple lenses that were shaped by our backgrounds, inspired by community relationships, and guided by an education that fostered the habits of public engagement. Such insights gave each of us a sense of possibility, of the potential for crafting a professional life that could transform students’ learning experience and also contribute to the public good. A career in the academy was not what we initially envisioned for ourselves, but it became the cornerstone for how we could embody the

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values of equity and social justice through teaching, research, and community practice.

Early in our careers we held academic administrative positions: Margaret at a small liberal arts college and Elaine at a large public research university. Much of our work was across stakeholder groups on and off campus, seeking to bridge the worlds of the classroom and community. Like many of our colleagues we were crossing boundaries and seeking ways of building stronger, more connected relationships between students, faculty, and community partners. These positions also exposed us to the challenges of navigating entrenched institutional structures and disciplinary boundaries. They called on us to embrace uncertainty and risk. We confronted resistance as we advocated for the educational opportunities that we believe are critical to student access, retention, and success. We learned hard lessons about what it takes to transform colleges and universities into more equitable institutions. Ultimately such constraints limited our ability to make the changes we believed were necessary, and we moved on from these positions. However, as we moved on, we took with us new clarity about a larger story of change agents in higher education.

During these years, we connected with a community of colleagues—including our coauthors of this chapter—who shared similar commitments and who had encountered in their own work the same kinds of uncertainty and risk-taking that we had experienced. These connections empowered us to see new possibilities, take on new leadership opportunities, and strive for greater impact. Elaine chose a broader scholarly focus on the study of institutional cultures and climates needed for the successful practice of community engagement and community-engaged scholarship. Now in a faculty position at Merrimack College, her graduate teaching and research are focused on deepening the connections for students to community, supporting early-career faculty, and promoting institutional change through community engagement. Margaret benefited from a postdoctoral fellowship and now has a visiting scholar appointment at the Rockefeller Center at Dartmouth College. In this context she supports a public policy research program, mentoring undergraduate research teams and collaborating with local legislators on policy projects. She has had space to be creative in the classroom and also develop new research collaborations, integrating her commitment to community-based change with participatory methods that allow for shared learning and collective inquiry that can lead to social impact. Our collaboration through the Next Generation Engagement Project and our appointments as visiting scholars at the New England Resource Center for Higher Education have enhanced the work we do on our individual campuses.

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While our current work is “nontraditional,” we find ourselves in spaces of creativity and innovation. Our teaching, research, and practice are richer because of our connections with other next-generation scholars. Our work is also enriched because we are embedded within a broader network of academic leaders and practitioner-scholars who believe that change in higher education is possible. Such relationships and environments give us hope that our vision and leadership can join with others to transform colleges and universities into places of greater equity for a stronger democracy.

Moving From the Individual to the Collective

As a group, our increased understanding of community engagement and the change we want to see through engaged practice and scholarship is the driving force of our work in higher education. Our clarity of purpose beyond those that are defined by the higher education institution is of utmost importance. In mobilizing the privileges and resources we have gained in our positions, this clarity has led us to advance institutional resources outward and into the community. We steward a counternormative practice within the world of higher education. As a new generation of boundary-spanning practitioner-scholars we seek to hold the academy accountable to its civic commitments. In this context we know that our work is subjected to a constant structural and cultural scrutiny, as are our legitimacy and authority. We expend enormous energy translating our work into institutional vernacular, asserting our credibility, and nudging our engagement practice toward an “ideal state.” While this task is daunting, we are also located within institutions that are interested in community engagement and have created ways to support community-engaged scholarship. These institutional contexts are cause for hopefulness.

We each take a critical stance toward higher education that informs our next-gen nature. This compels us to stay in higher education amid resistance to civic engagement and public scholarship. Our identities are inseparable from how we approach our teaching, research, and practice, bound up in the relationship to higher education that we formed as students and early change agents. We acknowledge that part of next-generation engagement is a driving concern for the purpose of higher education: it is not a happenstance workplace, nor is it defined by narrow disciplinary or community affiliations.

We believe that this is the moment to advance new structures and practices that promote community-engaged scholarship, teaching, and practice. Individually, we are called to integrate our whole selves in our work and commit to allow our students and communities to do the same. We know
this is messy and complicated. It requires a willingness to take risks, to ask new questions, and to discard the ability to know with certitude that exactly one thing leads to another. It challenges us to foster new kinds of relationships with colleagues across traditional silos and disciplinary boundaries, to work through times when we openly and wholeheartedly disagree, and to cocreate, together with our neighbors, a more interconnected world.

References


Grounded in the deep history of the engagement movement in higher education but spoken in the voices of its next generation, Publicly Engaged Scholars is both unflinching in its presentation of the challenges—personal, professional, political—facing those who seek to transform higher education for the greater good and hopeful in its demonstration of the persistence and adaptability of engaged scholarship. Anyone concerned about higher education’s contribution to democracy should read it.

—Andrew J. Seligsohn, President, Campus Compact

The concern that the democratic purposes of higher education -- and its conception as a public good -- are being undermined, with the growing realization that existing structures are unsuited to addressing today's complex societal problems, and that our institutions are failing an increasingly diverse population, all give rise to questioning the current model of the university.

This book presents the voices of a new generation of scholars, educators, and practitioners who are committed to civic renewal and the public purposes of higher education. They question existing policies, structures, and practices, and put forward new forms of engagement that can help to shape and transform higher education to align it with societal needs.

The scholars featured in this book make the case for public scholarship and argue that, in order to strengthen the democratic purposes of higher education for a viable future that is relevant to the needs of a changing society, we must recognize and support new models of teaching and research, and the need for fundamental changes in the core practices, policies, and cultures of the academy.