

An Exploration of the Influence of Public Scholarship on Faculty Work

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Abstract:

The purpose of our study was to explore the effects of engagement on faculty members' academic work, research, teaching, and service. We found that faculty were more open with their students about how their teaching plans work and do not work; faculty members' initial commitments to providing service for communities were reinforced; and faculty viewed their research, teaching, and service as integrated, and not separate acts of scholarship. This article applies social identity and job characteristics theories to these three themes to explore why faculty members' perception of their work changed as a result of their engagement in public scholarship.

Keywords: public scholarship | faculty | engagement

Article:

Introduction

Public scholarship is an emergent philosophy of education which suggests that higher education institutions have a civic responsibility to engage in knowledge creation and problem solving that are relevant and helpful to the public. Nationally, the practice of public scholarship—"the application of scholarship by faculty and students in their teaching and learning, research, and service to the civic, cultural, artistic, social, economic, and educational needs of the community" (Cohen and Yapa 2003, 5)—is becoming more prevalent. Public scholarship may be conceptualized as an umbrella term (Museus, Janke, and Domagal-Goldman 2006) encompassing service-learning, community-based research, and undergraduate research on public problems. The rapid increase in the number of peer-reviewed journal articles on service-learning alone is evidence of academics' rising interest in public scholarship. Since 1995, scholars have published over 840 peer-reviewed journal articles on service-learning (Educational Resources Information Center 2007). Prior to 1995, scholars had published a mere 29 articles on this topic in peer-reviewed journals.

In an effort to understand why faculty are becoming involved in public scholarship, researchers have focused on factors that motivate or dissuade them. These factors include individual characteristics, such as gender (Abes, Jackson, and Jones 2002; Antonio, Astin, and Cress 2000; Hammond 1994), race (Antonio, Astin, and Cress 2000; O'Meara 2002), rank (Antonio, Astin, and Cress 2000; Abes, Jackson, and Jones 2002), experience (Bandura 1977; Boyte 2004; Donahue 2000), discipline (Antonio, Astin, and Cress 2000; Abes, Jackson, and Jones 2002), and epistemology (Colbeck and Wharton-Michael 2006), as well as organizational characteristics, such as mission (O'Meara 2002), resources (Ramaley 2000), norms (Huber 2002), and evaluation (Colbeck and Wharton-Michael 2006; O'Meara 2002). Research also suggests faculty have pedagogical motivations to enhance student learning (McKay and Rozee 2004, 27), as well as service motivation to assist communities through university-community partnerships (Abes, Jackson, and Jones 2002).

In this article, we explore the relationship between faculty engagement in public scholarship and motivation from a different direction. Rather than investigating what factors influence faculty engagement in public scholarship, our work considers how faculty members' engagement influences their academic work, teaching, research, and service. We present a single case study and two theories to explore how faculty members from two universities who participated in one public scholarship project experienced nontraditional work roles and relationships with students and community partners. We suggest that as faculty members work together with students and community partners to address real-world issues, the characteristics of their jobs and their social interactions may shift enough to change their perceptions of their students and academic work roles.

A Case Study of Public Scholarship Practice

We studied faculty members who teach two parallel threesemester service-learning course series offered through the Architectural Engineering and Architecture departments at the Pennsylvania State University at University Park (PSU), and the Landscape Architecture program at University of Wisconsin at Madison (UW). The PSU design-build course is an elective that enrolls approximately thirty-five students from several disciplines, including engineering, biology, and community and economic development. At UW, a professor in landscape architecture offers a three-semester (spring, summer, and fall) program, which may be taken either as an independent study or not for credit, to design and build landscape features. In the first (spring) semester, students working under faculty supervision at PSU and UW study and design various systems of a strawbale structure and the landscape, including water, energy, and air systems. In the second (summer) semester, students travel to Lame Deer, Montana, to translate their systems blueprints into an actual building and landscape for Chief Dull Knife College (CDKC), a tribal college on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation. Students from Penn State and University of Wisconsin work alongside and consult with faculty, construction professionals, community members, Chief Dull Knife College administrators and staff, as well as graduate students and returning student participants from previous years (program "alumni"). All participants (approximately 30 PSU students, 15 UW students, 10 alumni, 3 faculty members, and 5 volunteers) camp in tents on the grounds of the Northern Cheyenne community center, cook, and eat together, as well as work cooperatively on constructing the strawbale building and

related landscape. In the third (fall) semester, PSU and UW students return to their respective campuses where they participate in extensive reflection exercises to make sense of their experience with construction management and landscape design, as well as the Northern Cheyenne culture.

The summer construction project is organized under the auspices of the American Indian Housing Initiative (AIHI), a collaborative effort between Chief Dull Knife College, Pennsylvania State University, University of Wisconsin, and the Northern Cheyenne tribe. The nine-year-old initiative is funded, in large part, by the National Science Foundation and has completed four homes, an adult education center, a technology center, an early childhood learning center, and several small-scale testing and research buildings. The mission of AIHI is to adapt and deploy sustainable building technologies on American Indian reservations. AIHI partners seek an educational exchange of cultural values and sustainable building technologies through collaborative and interdisciplinary partnerships.

Methods

To explore whether and how public scholarship influences faculty work, the lead author interviewed the instructors of the AIHI public scholarship program from PSU and UW during the summer when they were on the construction site with students and community members. The lead author also lived and worked on the site as a participant observer and kept a journal of thoughts and themes she developed as a result of formal interviews, informal conversations, and two-week-long observations of faculty members' interactions with each other, students, and community members. Semistructured interviews with faculty members were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed for their perceptions about how their involvement with the partnership has affected (1) how they think about their academic work in terms of teaching, researching, and providing service, (2) their research focus, (3) their approaches to teaching, and (4) their sense of who they are as academics. Participants included three faculty members: an associate professor of architectural engineering and a full professor of architecture from PSU, and an assistant professor of landscape design from UW. The first author conducted all interviews and maintains all interview transcripts.

Results

This exploratory study is part of a larger research project designed to understand faculty-community partnerships and the development of partnership identity (Janke 2007, 2006). During interviews, faculty members related stories about the differences between teaching a public scholarship course, in residence, and teaching on their home campus. They shared their philosophies about teaching, research, and service, and reflected, retrospectively, on how they had changed throughout their experience with the public scholarship project.

We identified three themes that directly related to how the faculty members' academic work had been affected by their involvement in public scholarship: (1) faculty were more open with their students about how their design and management plans work and do not work, (2) faculty members' initial commitments to providing service for communities were reinforced, and (3) faculty viewed their research, teaching, and service as integrated, and not separate acts of

scholarship. These three themes intrigued us as ways in which public scholarship may have different effects on faculty than traditional classroom-based practices. We present our findings in the following section and then suggest how job characteristics theory (JCT) (Hackman and Oldham 1976) and social identity theory (SIT) (Tajfel and Turner 1986) may be useful theoretical tools for understanding the influences of organizational structures and social contexts on faculty work.

Increased Receptiveness to and Openness with Students

Forming close personal connections with faculty members is associated with significant and positive college outcomes for students (Pascarella and Terenzini 1991, 2006). We found that forming close personal connections with students had powerful effects on the faculty members involved in AIHI as well. For example, the faculty members spoke about how their experiences of working closely with students on projects, including living with them in nearby tents, sharing meals, and participating in evening activities, created closer faculty-student ties than were often possible with classroom-based courses. Two faculty members described the closeness that developed through working alongside students to design and construct various aspects of the project.

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Faculty also spoke about how such experiences facilitated many spontaneous and informal moments during which they observed and spoke openly with students about how each was experiencing the project. One faculty member spoke about the “immediate feedback of doing something wrong or going too far or challenging students too much. I see it in their exhaustion and hear it in their emotional outbursts. In the classroom, I only see how they feel about their test scores.” Working on-site with students provided him “the experience to be honest about how things work and don’t work.” It seemed that immediate and continual feedback between faculty and students had opened lines of communication and increased the extent to which faculty exposed their own successes and failures to their students.

Reinforced Commitment to Serving Communities

Faculty reported that their commitment to their partners, as well as their commitment to serving communities through public scholarship, had increased since they first became involved in the partnership. In a sense, their commitment was a source of pride. One faculty member spoke of tribal members’ reactions when he and his students returned after a summer that had been particularly difficult due to residents’ disagreements regarding the location of the building site. Although the tensions that arose from that project had been frustrating for the faculty and students involved, one professor related in his interview the importance of returning to the reservation the following year as an act of commitment to their partners. The professor told us that his CDKC partners exclaimed, “What is so amazing is that you came back!” The professor continued, “And that’s been the most impressive thing. There have been anthropologists who get what they need and go, and they have friends that they make, but there’s no sustainable

partnership. ‘You keep coming back! That totally amazes us! You know, that’s not been our experience.’”

Faculty spoke about more than their commitment to the Northern Cheyenne community and college. They also noted ways in which their engagement in the AIHI public scholarship project supported their decisions to integrate other communities in their future teaching and research. For example, one professor said that he shifted his research focus from design for communities to assessing the outcomes his partners receive as a result of his and his students’ work. “Well, it was getting far away from design, and it was getting into community outcomes of these partnerships. . . . I wouldn’t have done that if I hadn’t been a part of this. So my research has been about partnerships in a way.” Additionally, another professor’s research has expanded, since he first began the project, to include volunteer-friendly construction management techniques to better understand how to provide low-income families with the opportunity to build their own homes. He too found ways to integrate community needs into his research.

Integration of research, teaching, and service

Faculty members pointed to ways in which their public scholarship activities efficiently and effectively incorporated simultaneously the teaching, research, and service missions of the university. For example, one professor described service as a component of research as well as teaching:

I really talked about it in terms of those three things of teaching, research, and service to the community, outreach. And I think that I’ve always kind of viewed it as a myriad of those things. My effort has been to keep a good healthy balance of those things, and to make sure that the students have a good learning experience, but make sure that there’s some technical rigor in what we’re doing, and asking the right questions, and that we are not taking; we are doing a service.

A second professor suggested that research and service went hand in hand in his field. “Here’s the funny thing for me, because it’s also research. For me research is design. That’s how we classify [it]. So, it’s kind of service and [this project is] kind of research.” Despite their own perceptions about their work roles as synergistic, AIHI faculty members continued to feel tensions between their valuation of the work and the judgment of their peers in the department and university. One went so far as to indicate he might leave his academic job if his university would not support his integrated public scholarship work.

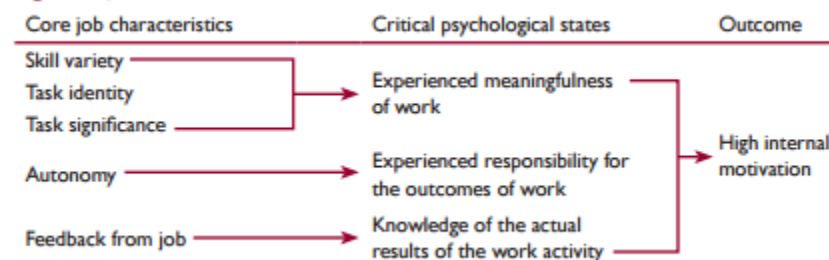
Teaching and service, service-learning. I like public scholarship, the scholarship of public interest. And I can do that; I don’t need the university to do that, not in my field. So part of the way it’s changed is that if my university, or my college, or my department won’t change in the time that I need it to change to value what I do, then I need to have enough of a trajectory to do non-profit design work, to write the grants that I need to support my salary and the staff I would need, and this partnership has given me plenty of information about how to make that possible.

The AIHI faculty members, despite their personal feelings about integrating academic roles, continued to feel the tension between teaching, research, and service as “counting” toward different aspects of their academic portfolios at their home campuses. Another professor said that his priority was teaching “and now even more so with teaching” as a result of his public scholarship experience. “Well, I always thought that I was more of a teacher than a researcher. But I think that it’s [now] just a little more, my role as a teacher and how I fit in the department, you know, it’s a little more solidified. . . . I’ve probably downgraded the research side of things and probably elevated the service side.” Thus, the AIHI faculty discussed their continuing struggle with balancing the three roles although, at times, they argued that the three were achieved simultaneously.

Job Characteristics Theory

We used job characteristics theory (Hackman and Oldham 1976), which links job characteristics with motivation as a lens to explore how the organizational structure, and specifically work tasks that may be an inherent part of public scholarship activities, may influence faculty members’ perceptions of their academic work. Hackman and Oldham’s theory is relevant to public scholarship work because it suggests that workers’ (or faculty members’) motivation may be linked to the types of tasks they engage in while “on the job.” More specifically, workers’ views of core features of their jobs may affect their psychological reactions to the job and the outcomes that follow from those reactions (Panzano, Seffrin, and ChaneyJones 2002). The five core job characteristics include: skill variety (perceived variety and complexity of skills and talents required to perform the job); task identity (perceived extent to which the job involves a whole, identifiable task); task significance (perceived extent to which the job affects the well-being of others); autonomy (perceived extent to which the job allows for personal initiative in performing the work); and feedback from the job (perceived extent to which that the job, itself, provides information about job performance).

Figure 1. Job Characteristics Model



Source: Adapted from Hackman and Oldham (1980). Copyright © 1980 by Pearson Education, Inc.

In short, the three-stage model of JCT (Hackman and Oldham 1980) shown in figure 1 posits that desire to do a job well is mediated by psychological responses to job characteristics. In particular, how individuals make sense of their job’s meaningfulness (the extent to which the work is seen as making a difference to others), work responsibilities (the extent to which the worker assumes responsibility for his/her work), and feedback for their work (the extent to which the worker is aware of the quality of his/her work) will likely affect their internal work motivation.

Most public scholarship can be characterized as high in the five core job characteristics. For example, skill variety is likely to be high because faculty may combine their teaching, research, and service roles, as well as establish relationships with students and community partners. Faculty who engage in public scholarship are likely to see many different aspects of their work (for example, their research, teaching, and service) as pieces of a whole task. Task significance is heightened to the extent that faculty members' work with their students is meant to affect the well-being of others. Autonomy may be heightened to the extent that faculty members engaged in public scholarship feel their work is guided by their own personal initiative, that they are managers of the partnership, and that they have direct relationships with students and community partners. Finally, collaboration with students and community agents may increase the likelihood that faculty members will receive frequent and quick feedback regarding their work. In sum, the tasks that may be inherent to public scholarship activities may increase the extent to which faculty are motivated to continue their engaged work.

Job characteristics theory may be useful in understanding how the tasks required of the faculty in our study may have influenced their motivation to engage in public scholarship while on the project, as well as in the future. For example, faculty and students quickly learned as they began to construct a rock retaining wall that their carefully prepared blueprints needed to be reevaluated and redrawn to address the site-specific dimensions. Alterations to the plan provided an opportunity for faculty and students to work alongside each other essentially as coworkers to generate the changes needed. This and other nontraditional experiences between faculty and students (including sleeping in tents and eating together) provided faculty with feedback about their work, as well as satisfaction in seeing the positive effects of the project on both the community and the students. Drawing from JCT, we suggest that faculty who have the opportunity to see, firsthand, the difference that they are making in improving the situation of a community or the education of a student may be more motivated to (continue to) engage in public scholarship than those who do not see such immediate, and sometimes tangible, effects of their work.

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We also suggest that faculty who experience their three roles (teaching, research, and service) as complementary activities that make up a whole task (public scholarship) may be more motivated to remain engaged with communities than those who do not. In each of our interviews, we heard faculty speak of the satisfaction and enjoyment they felt as their three work roles became increasingly balanced and synergistic. We believe that the characteristics inherent in public scholarship activities, such as the close collaboration with students and the integration of academic roles, may lead to an interlocking cycle in which engagement fosters the desire to remain engaged.

Social Identity Theory

We used social identity theory as a theoretical lens to understand these faculty members' descriptions of their work in the residential public scholarship program as linked to how they

perceived themselves and their students. Social identity theory suggests that an individual's sense of who she or he is may be linked to membership in groups. Social identity describes how persons classify themselves and others into certain social categories or as a common human collectivity (Haslam 2004; Tajfel and Turner 1986). Studies conducted by Tajfel and Turner (1986) on the minimal requirements for feelings of group membership suggest that intergroup differentiation occurs subconsciously and frequently. Even persons who are grouped randomly tend to demonstrate preferences for members of their group (ingroup) in comparison to those not within their group (outgroup). Persons tend to prioritize ingroup members (nepotism) and tend to give ingroup members the benefit of the doubt. For example, one might be more likely to think, "Tyler acted irrationally today" rather than "Tyler is inherently a bad person" if Tyler is a member of one's group.

“[F]aculty may spend more time and effort on their service roles not only because they see the effects . . . but also because of their affiliation and identification with students and community partners.”

In the public scholarship program we studied, faculty members lived and worked alongside students for several weeks. We suggest that SIT may provide an additional lens on why faculty became more open to students and increased their commitments to the community. On the whole, faculty members' attitudes toward students and community members may have changed as they began to identify with them as members of a public scholarship group.

The relocation of learning from the classroom to the field immersed students and faculty in a shared experience. The faculty members worked, learned, and lived alongside the students for three weeks. Together they helped to design and build retaining walls for the playground and to stucco the walls of the daycare center. Together they learned about the Northern Cheyenne culture during horseback rides and community-led events, such as the powwow and the sweat lodge. The faculty members camped alongside the students and shared three meals a day with them. Faculty and students were immersed in the public scholarship experience together as each had relocated from their own homes to live together for a brief period of time.

In our study, we heard professors speak of their increased commitment to sustaining the partnership. Social identity theory suggests that such commitments may develop through social interactions with one's partners. We suggest that faculty members who engage in public scholarship projects may be likely to view their students and community partners as ingroup members. Furthermore, faculty may spend more time and effort on their service roles not only because they see the effects, as suggested in JCT, but also because of their affiliation and identification with students and community partners. Ultimately, faculty members' motivations for their service, teaching, and research roles may be linked to how, if at all, they perceive students and community agents as members within a common group effort (i.e., a sense of "we"), rather than as persons who do not share a group membership (i.e., a sense of "us and them").

The faculty members' heightened awareness of students' feelings about the program and what they thought they were (and should be) learning may have occurred chiefly because the faculty accepted their students as members of their ingroup while on the project. One faculty member

described the group that was on the reservation as a “learning community that involves students, faculty, and organizations (community partners) so we become co-learners.” His description of the group as a single learning community signified his identification with his students as members of the same distinct group.

Social identity theory may also help us to understand faculty members’ increased commitments to their partnership with communities for service-learning. Social interactions with community members in the public scholarship project may lead to increased social identification with those partners and may also affect participating faculty members’ views of their own academic work roles. In the lead author’s interview, she heard AIHI faculty speak about how communication had become easier (“I have learned a lot about how to work with them. . . . I think they have also gotten to know us. . . . You know that there’s just a mutual understanding”) and relationships with community members had transformed into what two of the faculty labeled “friendships.”

The organizational structure and the social characteristics of partnership activities may influence how faculty perceive and prioritize their academic work. For the faculty members we studied, interactions with students and community partners in public scholarship activities affected the motivations to teach, research, and provide service. As our interviews show, the faculty members experienced an increased awareness of and responsiveness to students’ feelings. Students’ feelings were interpreted by faculty members as informal evaluations of their teaching. Using social identity theory, we argue that the faculty members may have been increasingly receptive to their students because of the bonds that they may have formed through ingroup associations.

Conclusion and Suggestions for Future Research

Job characteristics theory suggests that faculty members may be motivated to integrate their research, teaching, and service roles in other areas of their academic work as a result of their positive psychological assessments of their public scholarship work. Social identity theory takes a similar approach to understanding how context affects motivation, but focuses on the power of interpersonal categorization processes to affect cognition and motivation, rather than the characteristics of certain organizational structures. Our study suggests that faculty motivations regarding their on-campus teaching, research, and service roles may be affected once they have already become engaged in public scholarship activities.

The findings from this single case study certainly cannot be generalized to other populations of faculty, but the relationships found may be investigated with faculty engaged in other public scholarship efforts. We suggest that future research explore the evolution of relationships between engagement in public scholarship and faculty motivations in their on-campus academic work roles. In our study, we found that participation in public scholarship affected how the faculty members approached their academic work while on-site in the field. However, we wonder about the extent to which faculty members who create ingroup associations with students and community members while they are in the field maintain those associations with these and other partners once they have returned to campus. Do their associative ties to students and community members persist? Do they perceive students who are not part of the public scholarship effort as part of their ingroup?

Prior research has shown that in instances where faculty members serve as lead learners rather than as teachers in the traditional sense of transferring course content, power becomes less stratified (Clark and Young 2005). Perhaps decreased power differentials may facilitate a sense of affiliation between students and faculty. Future research may be useful in exploring the role of shared identity in how faculty members experience a heightened awareness of students' feelings and the extent to which the close proximity in which they work together fosters faculty members' perceptions of students as ingroup members. Finally, additional research should also explore how faculty resolve the tensions between the view of integrated academic work that they hold while actively engaged in a project and the predominant cultures of their home institutions, which tend to recognize research, teaching, and service as separate roles.

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