

The Cambridge Handbook of Service Learning and Community Engagement

With contributions from leading experts across disciplinary fields, this book explores best practices from the field's most notable researchers, as well as important historically based and politically focused challenges to a field whose impact has reached an important crossroads. The comprehensive and powerfully critical analysis considers the history of community engagement and service learning, best teaching practices and pedagogies, engagement across disciplines, and current research and policies – and contemplates the future of the field. The book not only will inform faculty, staff, and students on ways to improve their work, but also will suggest a bigger social and political focus for programs intended to seriously establish democracy and social justice in their communities and campuses.

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Preface

Education and Democracy: Conversations on Pedagogies for Change

Corey Dolgon, Tania D. Mitchell, and
Timothy K. Eatman

Welcome to the *Cambridge Handbook for Service Learning and Community Engagement*. This is not a typical handbook, though. While we offer what we think are excellent chapters on best practices in service learning and community engagement, this handbook also speaks to where we believe the field itself *is* and where it *needs to be*. In this regard, we embrace service learning in its most dynamic and evolving sense. We present an in-depth yet multiperspective history of the field, an overview of the current academic and institutional landscape, and some critical voices about where our future could and should be. Even the reviews of “best practices” have authors and practitioners considering the future of engaged teaching, learning, research, and institutional change.

We hope this handbook will be useful to a wide range of “interest groups” involved in service learning and community engagement: from students, staff, faculty, and administrators at all types of higher education institutions to community-based nonprofit agency staff, local groups and faith leaders, organizers and activists, unions, undocumented workers, refugees, neighborhood residents, homeless people, and all of the individuals and constituencies whose lives must be embraced and included if we are to seriously consider education as the practice of democracy and freedom. But we also hope this book is helpful for those who engage in these endeavors uncomfortably, apprehensively, and critically, as well as those whose concerns have been so significant that they avoid service learning and community engagement work altogether. While we believe there are elements of engaged pedagogy and scholarship that have proven influential and impactful for students, faculty, institutions of higher education, and their community partners, this book is not about boosterism; it’s about transformation. We hope this book promotes radical changes not only in education but in our most fundamental institutions of social and civic life – transformation that requires serious people undertaking significant deliberation and committing ourselves to substantive redistribution of resources and power. We will need a more robust democracy to get there; we will never achieve such a democracy without it.

Thus, we embrace the proliferation of service learning and community engagement with a simultaneous sense of accomplishment and trepidation. As we recognize the rapid growth of campus–community partnerships and the institutionalization of engaged pedagogy and scholarship, we cannot ignore

the impact of monetizing student service hours (measuring impact by counting hours and assigning a monetary value to those hours to claim total monetary value of student service to the community); requiring outcome assessments that inherently narrow the scope of project and partnership possibilities; and the overall depoliticizing effects of career-based curriculum-, foundation-, and endowment-focused goals and corporate hegemony and neoliberal ideologies that, in their own ways, have transformed higher education, just not for the better. As powerful movements for a radically informed social justice break out around the country, we wonder if and how service learning and community engagement scholars and practitioners have been able to incorporate student strikes over racist campus cultures, divestment movements over climate change and the occupation of Palestine, Occupy Wall Street, #BlackLivesMatter, campus sexual assault, and the Sanctuary City movement. And we are forced to note that with very few exceptions, the colleges and universities where we work and sometimes live have been slow to act, if at all, to support the forces of antiracism, economic equality, environmental justice, and global human rights. We can and must do better.

From the University of Missouri to Garissa University in Kenya, from Oregon's Umpqua Community College to the cafeteria kitchens, classroom buildings, and campus restrooms around the country, we are also reminded that the distinction between campus life and "real" life is a distortion we can no longer be complicit with. For too long the commodification of higher education has created the student-consumer identity and turned faculty and staff into college concierges while students get along with the more important part of their degree completion – career training and development and job placement. Our institutions of higher learning espouse diversity and inclusion but avoid being antiracist or fighting against economic exploitation at all costs. Almost twenty years after Barbara Ehrenreich (1997) accused Yale University of contributing to the "bandit economy" of late capitalism – busting unions and exploiting itinerant adjuncts and graduate students – most if not all colleges wear their neoliberal, corporate connections as badges of honor. The irony of simultaneously teaching humanities and promoting global suffering and exploitation means little in a postironic world. Even the shame is gone.

Yet students are fighting back, taking seriously the idea that institutions of higher education are places in and through which their voices and advocacy can be heard. We see this in efforts to expose the horrors of police brutality, of which the lives of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Sandra Bland, Tamir Rice, Philando Castile, and Tanisha Anderson (among many others) have become emblematic, to fair-wage campaigns for custodial and maintenance staff and divestment movements from the prison-industrial complex and fracking companies: students are refusing to be coddled by community service and volunteerism that smacks of feel-good activism or noblesse oblige. Can a more politically astute and serious service learning and community engagement be bold enough to embrace these trends and explore their impact on the everyday lives of campuses and communities?

Almost half a century ago, college campuses erupted in protests that linked what once seemed like provincial student issues with both local community conflicts and global anticolonial revolutions. At Columbia, antiwar activists and Harlem antigentrification activists found common ground and common efforts in their challenge to the racist military-industrial academic complex represented by the institution's trustees and administrators. And at historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) throughout the South, students broke with white supremacist power structures and black bourgeois complicity to join with local activists, create their own militant movements, and see commonality with anticolonial revolutions in Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia. But these and scores of other examples occurred *because* political actions came within the context of political education: teach-ins, free schools, and a willingness to find alternative spaces both on and off campus to connect local actions with global revolutions.

In contrast to most work on service learning and community engagement, this handbook embraces community-engaged practice as political education. We, and our contributors, approach the topics in this volume with belief that the pedagogical possibilities of community engagement allow us to “seize what ought to be” – to work for significant and substantive change in the communities where we work and in the commitments we make to each other as we do. The authors explore what it might mean for community engagement practitioners to fully embrace our commitment, to paraphrase Nadinne Cruz, to align our intentions and actions in a move toward more just relationships. The chapters in this volume will provide a necessary orientation to foundational literature in service learning and community engagement that can inform practice, but also challenge with innovation and opportunity that may move our work closer to the transformative practice we know it can be. The handbook is divided into five parts: Part I, Histories of Education and Engagement; Part II, Best Practices and Pedagogies; Part III, Engaged Teaching and Scholarship across Disciplines; Part IV, Research, Teaching, Professions, and Policy; and Part V, Critical Voices. Each part begins with an introduction that provides an overview of the contents. Readers might choose to read the volume through, explore the sections most relevant to their particular inquiry, or approach the handbook as a resource guide – finding the chapter that best meets your needs at that moment. Our aim is to share a comprehensive guide of community-engaged practice that you can return to time and again in considering the complex and unique opportunities present in campus–community partnerships. The reflections, lessons, and challenges serve to push us toward a more just and inclusive practice.

As we consider the “next wave” for service learning and civic engagement, practitioners must be willing to take on the big questions of democracy and political engagement. Researchers must be willing to put aside meaningless indicators of meaningless variables and begin to consider how one might measure the serious impacts necessary to make significant social change. And students, faculty, administrators, and community partners must be prepared to

transcend weak notions of reciprocity and pursue principled collaborations to work against oppression in all of its manifestations. These are tall orders, but all efforts to radically change society and seek what historian Robin D. G. Kelley (2003) has called “freedom dreams” must inherently be so.

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