

# Embracing Opportunity: Engaging Higher Education through Community Engagement

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Marshall Welch, *Engaging Higher Education: Purpose, Platforms, and Programs for Community Engagement*. Sterling, VA: Stylus, 2016, 312 pages. ISBN 978-1620363843

There are moments in history that afford the opportunity to look critically at where we have come from and where we are going in light of the needs of our current times for a civically engaged populous. At a time when students at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida mobilized young people, families, mothers, fathers, community members, legislators, and leaders of all ages to come together across the country, how can we inspire and empower more young people to engage now as local citizens and change makers in the democratic process? How are the systems and opportunities we provide in college critical components to student empowerment as civic and community leaders?

Over the last 30 years, the field of community engagement within higher education has evolved in structure and substance, with the development of centers and organizational synergy for the work within colleges and universities, and with our community partners. Our shared field of civic and community engagement has developed best practices that have come from institutions developing methods, systems, and structures built on their institutional culture, needs, and surrounding community. Now is the right time to capture our best practices in one place for practitioners of all levels of experience from those entrenched in the work to those beginning through practice, pedagogy, research, and leadership application.

In *Engaging Higher Education: Purpose, Platforms, and Programs for Community Engagement*, Marshall Welch challenges us to look at the purpose, platforms, and programs for community engagement within higher education and how they are influencing shared learning and sustainable change both in the academy and in our communities. Welch takes the reader on a thorough exploration of the purpose (the why) behind the work, the platforms and systems used (the what), and example programs in place across the country for

community-engaged learning, scholarship, and application (the how). Through the journey, Welch challenges us to reflect on and understand the systems and structures within higher education and community engagement that empower our students as the next generation of civic leaders.

There are three stated aims in the book: 1) provide valuable insight to current practice through the Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement; 2) equip center directors and campus leaders to integrate the practices into their institutional work; and 3) empower graduate students as the next generation of engaged leaders and scholars. In addition to its stated goals, the book is a deep dive into the history and development of community engagement in higher education. It provides an important, necessary refresher of the substantive thought that has shaped the work and defined its development. The lessons, framed in pedagogy and practical frameworks for change, are applicable for and accessible to the practitioner.

The first chapter explores the history and journey of how community engagement in the academy began and how it evolved into today's systems and structures. Starting with the public purpose of higher education and reflecting upon the pragmatic purpose; understanding the political purpose; exploring the pedagogical purpose; reflecting upon the professional purpose; and acknowledging that all five evolutions are cyclical and recurring. The second chapter acknowledges the multi-faceted nature of "engagement" in higher education and seeks to define its meaning relative to the Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement. It looks at what engagement is and what it is not grounded in community-engaged learning scholarship, research, and epistemology.

The third chapter explores how to move an institution to the stage of institutionalization of community engagement. Based on models of best practice and case study of institutions, the

information provides a guide, rooted in research, for the process regardless of type of institution (public, private, or faith-based). In chapter four, there are models of implementation of community engagement into all aspects of the institution. With incredible detail, practitioners will gain insight into each component of the process, models of best practice based on the institutional culture, institutional architecture for success, and steps from budgeting and strategic planning to systems and agreements.

Chapter five delves into the specific operations, infrastructure, and leadership role of community engagement centers as a binding connection across campus and in the community. It explores the varying financial models and leadership structures of centers at both private and public institutions. Chapters six through eight transition to the programs component of the book. With a deep dive into the role of students, faculty, and then community partners in engagement, the reader has practical, applied techniques and real-world examples entrenched in best practices and research. The final chapters offer the positive accomplishments of higher education's development of community engagement as a pedagogy, practice, value, and institutionalized component of all aspects of the university's life.

In the same spirit of candor and transparency, the negatives as well as the trends on the horizon are outlined. Welch offers projections of the future in civic and community engagement and in so doing provides a further road map for incoming practitioners. As Welch stated in the beginning, one goal was to not only empower current administrators and community engagement scholars, but also to empower the next generation of engaged practitioners, community leaders, teachers, and scholars.

Welch meets the three stated goals of the book with accuracy. This is a tremendous handbook for institutional leaders, especially administrators and center leaders, at any stage of community engagement, though the book would be best used by institutional leaders who appreciate and understand the value of the Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement. From a research perspective, the book is a great resource for graduate students pursuing topics related to history, context, institutionalization, or implementation of community engagement.

The appendix references other networks that have arisen out of best practice and implementation of community engagement. There are additional

networks noted, like the Research University Civic Engagement Network, the Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities, and The Democracy Commitment; however, Vote Everywhere and the All In Campus Democracy Challenge are examples of networks that are not explored thoroughly in the book. These, and other civically engaged networks, serve as useful reference points for taking the work beyond community engagement to civic and voter engagement for students and institutions seeking to take their community-based work to advocacy and voter action.

As we find ourselves at a point in history that affords the opportunity to look critically at where we have come from and where we are going in light of the needs of our current times for a civically engaged populous, it is important that leaders in higher education and specifically in community engagement understand the mechanics of best practice. Welch's book focuses more on community engagement than civic engagement. However, the practices herein are fundamental to engaging our students in practices of critical questioning and action for how we engage now as local citizens and change makers in the democratic process.

#### **About the Reviewer**

Dr. Hunter Phillips Goodman serves as the executive director of the Fitz Center for Leadership in Community at the University of Dayton. She received her doctoral degree from the University of Central Arkansas, is an alumna of the Bonner Scholars program and Presidential Leadership Scholars, and a board member of the International Association of Research on Service Learning and Civic Engagement.