Literature Review: Engaged Scholarship—A 360° Approach
[Materials that could be used in research, community practice, or social work pedagogy courses.]

The 360° Approach
According to the Center for Creative Leadership, the 360° approach is a concept derived from organizational psychology, human resources management, and industrial psychology (Hernez-Broome & Hughes, 2004). The term was coined to indicate that the most effective performance evaluations are based on feedback from a full circle of perspectives—from peers, subordinates, and managers. In this context, the 360° approach indicates that scholars are engaged—at all points of the process—with multiple stakeholders, both internal and external to the School. In other words, research, practice, and teaching inform each other. Each partner is a collaborator—listening, informing, and working through problems with others in order to reach a viable, effective solution to complex, pressing social problems.

Engaged Scholarship
After reviewing the development of the academy since the founding of the United States, Boyer (1990) described the university environment as one in which administrative structures rigidly separate disciplines into silos of advanced learning. These structures and their associated processes and products are, he observed, designed to meet the needs of the professoriate to publish rather than to resolve the pressing concerns of society.

Questioning whether this was the best use of faculty time and university resources, Boyer (1990) prescribed a new model which redefines traditional research as four scholarly endeavors: discovery, integration, application, and teaching. Boyer urged professors to engage in these activities for the purpose of resolving common human problems.

We need scholars who not only skillfully explore the frontiers of knowledge, but also integrate ideas, connect thought to action, and inspire students. The very complexity of modern life requires more, not less, information; more, not less, participation. If the nation’s colleges and universities cannot help students see beyond themselves and better understand the interdependent nature of our world, each new generation’s capacity to live responsibly will be dangerously diminished (1990, p. 77).

Building on this discussion, Barbara Holland, an international expert on engagement, provides a succinct definition: “Engaged scholarship, or engagement, refers to teaching and research activities that link academic institutions with external communities in mutually-beneficial knowledge exchange relationships” (2005, p. 1).

Campus Compact, a coalition of more than 1,000 college and university presidents established to promote engagement, defines engaged scholarship as “research in any field that partners university scholarly resources with those in the public and private sectors to enrich knowledge, address and help solve critical societal issues, and contribute to the public good” (Stanton, 2007, p.5).
The Commission on Community Engaged Scholarship in the Health Professions highlights the role of community in its definition: “Community-engaged scholarship is scholarship that involves the faculty member in a mutually beneficial partnership with the community” (Stanton, 2007, p. 6).

The American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) adds four dimensions of public engagement (2002):

1. It is place-related and linked to the community in which the institution is located.
2. It is interactive. The university is a resource, as are the partners in any effort. No one party owns all the problems and no one party has all the answers.
3. It is mutually beneficial to all partners in the endeavor.
4. It is integrated into the institution’s policies, incentive structures, and priorities.

The key to effective engagement is the reciprocal nature of the process. The School of Social Work at UNC envisions engaged scholarship as an iterative process through which engaged scholars conduct research in collaboration with consumers, students, agency leaders, practitioners, formal and informal community groups, and regulatory bodies such as CSWE, governmental agencies, and funders. Research questions are informed by a thorough consideration of the influence of context, time, and place (Small & Uttal, 2005). The goal is to fruitfully integrate the interests of scholars with the needs, issues, problems, or concerns of stakeholders.

Engaged research follows the same standards of rigorous scholarship as traditional research endeavors: identify and explore the problem, determine the researchable question; select methodology and design the study, collect and analyze data, disseminate results. In engaged research, however, researchers partner with stakeholders throughout the process. The level or degree of collaboration between scholar and constituent may vary as the process unfolds, but the process is distinguished at each step by collaboration among the partners (Stanton, 2007). The value of the knowledge that is generated will be measured by how well it works in practice—how well it helps to alleviate or at least ameliorate social problems.

For example, in engaged scholarship, researchers and stakeholders work together to define the problem and develop the research agenda. The scholar is responsible for determining appropriate design and methodology and, typically, for data collection. The scholar is also responsible for data analysis. Scholars and stakeholders work collaboratively to determine the value and significance of the knowledge that has been generated and to develop ways to disseminate knowledge. Stakeholders determine what additional steps they will undertake as a result of these research outcomes.

Engaged scholarship is becoming a standard among regulatory bodies. Growing numbers of federal funding agencies such as the National Institutes of Health and the National Science Foundation have incorporated criteria for collaborative approaches; and, a number of accrediting bodies have begun to introduce standards relating to engaged research and teaching.

Many institutions are beginning to explore engagement. Although engaged scholarship is not yet a requirement of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), the body that
accredits UNC, SACS does require a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). The UNC Chapel Hill plan, approved during the last re-affirmation cycle, is entitled *Making Critical Connections*. It stresses the development of stronger links between the curriculum and research activities of the faculty and professional staff. It also promotes connections which transcend traditional boundaries, creating pathways from the campus to local, national, and worldwide communities. The document is available at [http://www.unc.edu/inst_res/SACS/sacs.html](http://www.unc.edu/inst_res/SACS/sacs.html).

Interestingly, much of the literature on engaged scholarship has an exclusively external focus. Much less has been written regarding the infusion of research-based knowledge back into the curriculum through a real-time, intentional process. This lack of internal dissemination to students, and of the linking of internal and external stakeholder knowledge, is of real concern.

Hoge (2002), when discussing the training needs of a behavioral health workforce, referred to this as a “training gap,” which he defines as twofold. First, there is a gap between that which is being taught and current research findings, with evidence-based treatments and best available knowledge from research inconsistently presented in the curriculum. Second, there is a gap between that which is being taught and the realities facing practitioners in the field, given current policies, funding limitations, consumer needs, etc. (p. 311). For this project, “engaged scholarship” will include both an external, community-based focus as well as an internal, curriculum-based focus.

**Caveats**

A few caveats are in order: Engaged scholarship is not a new phrase for the traditional concept of service. Rather, engaged scholarship is an evolving approach in which “…academic institutions must become participants in a highly complex learning society where discovery, learning, and engagement are integrated activities that involve many sources of knowledge, generated in diverse settings by a variety of contributors” (Holland, 2005).

It is also important to note that not all community activities can be termed engaged scholarship (Stanton, 2007). Volunteer work on the part of faculty may advance the service mission of the institution, but it is not considered engaged scholarship unless it meets the strenuous, traditional standards of scholarship—clear, measurable goals; appropriate, rigorous methodology; reflective analysis and critique of process and results; applications of findings; and peer review.

Finally, engagement is a product of a learning community, not of individuals. It will not and should not replace all basic, traditional research efforts. It is not the right approach for every professor or for all situations. However, when appropriate, it entails significant benefits to all partners (Kiel, 2007).
References


