

Journals and Journeys: New Horizons in Public Scholarship

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It is an honor to offer this editorial for the first issue of the *Journal of Public Scholarship in Higher Education* – a bit like being asked to throw out the first pitch of a baseball game. Or, better perhaps – like being invited to christen a ship. For the launch of a journal, especially an innovative journal like *JPSHE*, is something like a ship's launch: a venture that is purposeful and exploratory, with a clear direction, yet into open waters. A new journal starts a new journey. So let me lift my figurative champagne bottle in celebration of the launch of *JPSHE* and offer a few thoughts about the new horizons – new opportunities, new problems – toward which it helps us to advance academic public work.

This journal, it seems to me, is based on a wager: a wager on the intellectual generativity of civic engagement. As the articles amply show, it is a bet worth taking. Across a broad range of disciplines, deploying an impressive array of practices and projects, the studies published here underscore how deeply scholarship is enriched when scholars produce knowledge and meaning not simply about the larger social world, but in it, for, and with community collaborators. And public life is enriched, in turn, when academics bring to it not simply our students, our commitments to engaged pedagogy, and our project partnerships, but also our gifts of scholarly rigor and creativity. Public scholarship has the capacity to make democratic problem-solving and democratic culture more robust; public engagement has the capacity to make scholarship more vibrant and consequential.

The *Journal of Public Scholarship in Higher Education* is by no means the first academic publishing venture of the civic engagement movement. It joins a growing landscape of journals, book series, and online resources dedicated to community-based learning, community partnerships, and public academic work. Many existing venues are focused on what Ernest Boyer called the scholarship of engagement: social-scientific research that investigates, distills, and assesses the practices of community-based pedagogy and community collaborations. Other publications focus on the results of action research or partnership projects within particular fields. All are essential to the development of an engaged academy.

Yet I would argue that *JPSHE*'s particular commitment to the scholarly generativity of academic public work – within, across, and sometimes against all disciplines – gives it a distinctive voice. As a movement, as an academy, we need to nurture that commitment: We need public work that takes seriously the whole, wide world of scholarly research as its domain. To put it in Boyer's

terms, we need to foster not only a scholarship of engagement, but also an engaged scholarship of inquiry, one that produces new knowledge for both the academy and its publics. The *Journal of Public Scholarship in Higher Education* can be an important vessel for such an engaged scholarship of inquiry. As it embarks on its journey, I look forward to scholarship that will illuminate and renew my own field of American Studies – and many other fields – precisely by pursuing scholarship for and with public partners.

In the process, I think, the journal will confront some important, emerging issues in the definition and pursuit of public scholarship – “next-generation” problems with which we have only begun to deal. I would point to three issues, in particular, looming on the horizon of this particular voyage. We might call them the *what*, *where*, and *who* problems of public scholarship.

The first is the issue of scholarly genre. Anyone who has pursued community-based work – with its commitment to collaboration, multivocal dialogue, and iterative reflection – knows how often it challenges the limits of traditional monographic research as a means to distill and analyze the results of the work. It seems to me that *JPSHE* will need to accept that challenge, remaining open to heterodox forms and platforms of scholarly production, offering alternatives to the canonical monograph and the largely social-scientific methods and models of the scholarship of engagement. Public scholarship invites experimental genres that play with multiple voices and alternative authorizing practices. I would encourage the journal to be a forum for such generic and presentational experimentation.

Similarly, I think that *JPSHE* will need to be open to – will want to embrace – new notions of the geography of engaged scholarship. Our movement’s most visible, influential work has typically been local. Indeed, the paradigm of the locally-based campus-community partnership has represented a crucial intervention against a distended geography of disciplinary professionalism that too often eviscerates the place-based civic responsibilities of academic institutions, denying those institutions and their communities the benefits of locally-embedded intellectual work. More and more, however, engaged scholars are problematizing the binary assumption that “engagement is local, and non-local academics are disengaged.” They are creating geographies of collaboration that seamlessly weave together local, global, and digital scales of democratic engagement. A new journal of public scholarship, it seems to me, should look to publish work at all these scales and to foster theoretical reflection about the links between them. The launch of *JPSHE* coincides, in short, with a remapping of the where of public work. An important part of its journey will be to explore this new geography.

Finally, a journal like this offers an opportunity to revisit who constitutes the we of public scholarship. All scholarship, all scholarly journals, are

the creations and expressions of a community of inquiry and practice. In this, all academics are social constructionists: We understand that there is no knowledge-making except within the ongoing, contested process of convening a “we” who collectively decide what counts as good questions, good methods, plausible answers. One of the great gifts of the civic engagement movement has been to challenge and enlarge who counts within the peer community of public academic work. Instead of vesting the disciplinary community of experts with monopoly power over the creation and assessment of research and curricula, our movement has called for an ethics of collaboration in which community partners (and students) play a shared role in defining the work to be done, the problems to be solved, the questions to be investigated, and the larger intellectual and social stakes of the effort. Much of the scholarship of engagement in existing journals of service-learning and community practice, in fact, explores this ethics of collaboration and the development of strong academic practices of partnership.

The launch of *JPSHE* marks an opportunity to take this question of the we even further. For a journal like this – committed not simply to community engagement but to public scholarship that emerges from it – who constitutes the community of practice within which intellectual agendas are defined, the excellence of work assessed? Who distills the reigning debates, the questions to be answered? What is the relationship between a community of public scholars and the non-scholarly community with whom they are partnering? Is expertise dependent on credential and affiliation or defined by intellectual contribution? The we of public scholarship is surely different from the circle of scholars who steward a traditional scholarly journal. Given this reality, how should we change the dynamics of authority that define how scholarly agendas are negotiated and carried out in collaboration with community partners?

These are thorny and consequential questions – questions opened up by the novelty and ambition of this venture in scholarly publishing. It is a testament to the importance of *JPSHE* that its existence already suggests new horizons of problems to tackle. The ship is well-launched, heading into an important, challenging voyage. Broken champagne bottle in hand, I can only say, Bon voyage!