

Practical Tools for Overcoming the Challenges of Advancing Your Career as a  
Community-engaged Scholar

Cathy Jordan

University of Minnesota

The community-engaged scholar often experiences challenges to career advancement (Commission on Community-Engaged Scholarship in the Health Professions, 2005). Fortunately, a variety of resources and tools are emerging to assist in overcoming these hurdles. This article reviews the challenges, in terms of developing skills, securing recognition for community-engaged scholarly work, and particularly in successfully navigating the promotion and tenure (P and T) system. This review is followed by presentation of several resources for addressing these challenges.

*Career Challenges for the Community-engaged Scholar*

*Few professional development pathways.* There are few established pathways or mechanisms for graduate students, post-doctoral trainees, and faculty to advance their skills in community-engaged scholarship (CES). Those opportunities that do exist tend to be isolated, often one-shot experiences that are not specifically geared for the developmental stage of the participants and will not contribute to the institutionalization of CES on campuses. Community-engaged faculty often need to devise their own faculty development opportunities and receive little support in doing so (Calleson, Jordan and Seifer, 2005).

*No accepted vehicle for peer review, publication, and dissemination of non-traditional products.* Although community-engaged teaching and research activities can certainly result in manuscripts appropriate for submission to peer-reviewed journals, these activities can also result in innovative, nontraditional products that, although often intended for the audience for which they

were developed, have potential for greater impact. Examples of such products include curricula, training manuals, websites, documentaries, policy briefs, etc. (Calleson et al., 2005). If these products could be peer-reviewed and disseminated broadly, they could be “counted” in the P and T process. At this time there are no accepted, rigorous mechanisms for peer review and dissemination of these nontraditional products of CES.

#### *Promotion and Tenure (P and T) Challenges for the Community-engaged Scholar*

*Lack of understanding of CES by P and T review committees.* CES has often been misunderstood by faculty peers and committee members as lacking in rigor, as qualitative, and as associated with the “softer” social science disciplines (Gibson, 2006). The ways that community-engagement enhances the rigor of teaching and research scholarship are not often understood or appreciated. In addition, committee members sometimes do not understand that community-engagement is an approach that a faculty member takes in conducting their teaching and research scholarship, not an activity isolated from the faculty member’s scholarly work. Such misunderstandings lead to perceptions of community-engaged scholarship as “just service” or volunteerism.

*Lack of understanding of CES by the faculty member.* Unfortunately, faculty themselves sometimes dissociate community engagement from their scholarship. They fail to recognize or take advantage of opportunities to create scholarship from their community-engaged activities. This promotes others’ “just service” interpretation of their community-engaged work. In addition, faculty sometimes assume that they are “doing CES” when in fact they are not. For example, simply using service-learning pedagogy in a course is not CES. If the faculty member documented the impact on student learning or on the partnering communities and created a product illustrating this impact that could be peer-reviewed and disseminated, that would be considered CES.

*Traditions of the System.* The traditional P and T system presents five challenges to the community-engaged scholar. First, the P and T system is usually grounded in a limited view of

impact, relying most heavily on number of peer-reviewed journal publications and the impact scores of those journals. Consideration of impact on relevant communities is rarely considered.

Second, the peer-reviewed manuscript is typically considered the acceptable form of scholarship. Alternative products, as discussed above, are either not counted or not weighted heavily in the P and T decision. This is partly because such products rarely receive the rigorous peer review that journal manuscripts do, as noted above (O’Meara & Edgerton, 2005). However, it is also the result of a limited definition of scholarship (Boyer, 1990).

Third, the P and T process relies not only on the peer review of scholarly products, but the peer review of the candidate themselves through examination of the assembled dossier. External letters by senior scholars at peer institutions within the candidate’s discipline are an important part of the P and T dossier. However, it can be difficult for both faculty candidates and departmental bodies responsible for P and T to locate appropriate external letter writers for community-engaged scholars. There are relatively few faculty that meet the criteria – senior, community-engaged, within the discipline, at a peer institution. In addition, departmental bodies do not always know how to distinguish genuine community-engaged scholars from those whose work is in communities or relevant to communities, but not engaged.

Fourth, P and T is about the individual achievements and contributions of the faculty candidate. However, engaged work is often a group effort and credit for production of the work and its impact is shared.

And fifth, most P and T guidelines require demonstration of leadership in the field and a national or international reputation, depending on rank. Community-engaged scholars often, at least at first, develop a local reputation as a result of their close relationships with community partners. Community-engaged scholars must be intentional and exert additional effort to expand their reputation beyond the local level.

*Resources for Advancing Your Community-engaged Scholarship*

Faculty for the Engaged Campus (FEC) is a joint project of Community-Campus Partnerships for Health, the University of Minnesota, and the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill funded by the Fund for the Improvement of Post-secondary Education within the U.S. Department of Education (see <http://depts.washington.edu/ccph/faculty-engaged.html>). FEC aims, in part, to provide information about the competencies necessary at various levels of mastery and experience with CES and ideas for how faculty development initiatives, tailored for the developmental stage of the participant, could enhance these competencies (Blanchard et al., in press). FEC provided an opportunity in May, 2008 for 20 campus teams to work on designs for a campus-wide competency-based faculty development program and is providing financial support for six of those campuses to implement their plans. These programs and their results will be shared with others after evaluation.

*Resources for Making the Case for Promotion or Tenure as a Community-engaged Scholar*

Community-Campus Partnerships for Health's Community Engaged Scholarship for Health Collaborative developed the Community-engaged Scholarship Review, Promotion and Tenure Package (Jordan, 2007) to assist faculty candidates in making their best case for promotion or tenure as community-engaged scholars and to assist P and T committee members in understanding what quality CES is and how to recognize it within the dossier. The characteristics of quality CES are grounded in the Glassick criteria (Glassick, Huber, & Maeroff, 1997) and include: 1) Clear Academic and Community Change Goals; 2) Adequate Preparation in Content Area and Grounding in the Community; 3) Appropriate Methods: Rigor and Community Engagement; 4) Significant Results: Impact on the Field and the Community; 5) Effective Presentation/Dissemination to Academic and Community Audiences; 6) Reflective Critique: Lessons Learned to Improve the Scholarship and Community Engagement; 7) Leadership and Personal Contribution; and 8) Consistently Ethical Behavior: Socially Responsible Conduct of Research and Teaching.

The Package includes several sections: 1) Definitions, such as for engagement, scholarship, and community-engaged scholarship; 2) the characteristics of quality CES including examples of evidence of possessing each characteristic and ideas for ways to document the characteristic in the dossier; 3) a fictitious dossier of a community-engaged scholar illustrating ways that CES can be documented in a dossier; 4) an “answer key” providing information about the ways the fictitious dossier does and does not demonstrate evidence for the characteristics of quality CES; 5) tables documenting how engagement enhances the rigor of each phase of the research and teaching processes; 6) PowerPoint presentations from conference presentations at which the Package was presented; and 7) instructions for how to conduct a faculty development exercise using a mock P and T committee meeting.

The Package is one component of the larger Community-Engaged Scholarship Toolkit (Calleson, Kauper-Brown, & Seifer, 2005). The toolkit provides very practical information for documenting CES in the dossier. For example, a myriad of examples are given for ways to use the curriculum vita to communicate about CES, including using symbols to denote publications resulting from community-based participatory research and annotating the dossier bibliography to provide information about the positive impact that a project or a product has had on a community. The toolkit also provides an ever-growing repository of dossiers of successfully promoted or tenured community-engaged scholars and a comprehensive list of helpful resources.

The Faculty for the Engaged Campus (FEC) project will also provide two important resources for facilitating the recognition of health-related (broadly defined) CES in the P and T process. A registry of senior community-engaged scholars searchable by discipline and type of institution will allow faculty candidates and departmental bodies responsible for coordinating the P and T process access to potential external letter writers. In addition, many of these individuals will be available for mentoring junior faculty.

The third component of FEC is CES4Health.info, a mechanism for the rigorous peer review of and broad online dissemination of nontraditional products of CES. CES4Health.info will encourage submissions from faculty authors, community authors, and collaborations. Peer review will mirror the processes used by print journals; however, products will be reviewed by both academic and community reviewers to assure attention to methodological rigor, authentic community-university engagement, and potential for community benefit. Users of the portal will be able to search for products by topic, type of resource, and format of resource, and, in most cases, download the document and supporting material, free of charge, from the portal.

### *Conclusion*

Community-engaged scholars often have felt challenged by the traditional P and T process. However, existing and emerging resources will promote the development of faculty competencies in CES, provide mechanisms for the peer review of nontraditional products of CES as well as the candidate's dossier, aid the faculty candidate in making their best case for promotion or tenure as a community-engaged scholar, and assist P and T committee members in understanding CES and recognizing quality CES in the dossier. However, these resources must be part of a comprehensive plan to institutionalize CES on university campuses; they cannot succeed in promoting CES without structural, systemic, and policy changes to support and reward CES.

## References

- Blanchard, L. W., Hanssmann, C., Strauss, R. P., Belliard, J. C., Krichbaum, K., Waters, E. & Seifer, S. (in press). Models for faculty development: What does it take to be a community-engaged scholar? *Metropolitan Universities Journal*.
- Boyer, E. L. (1990). *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the professoriate*. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.
- Calleson, D. C., Jordan, C., & Seifer, S. D. (2005). The scholarship of community engagement: Is faculty work in communities a true academic enterprise? *Academic Medicine*, 80(4), 317-321.
- Calleson D., Kauper-Brown J., & Seifer S. D. (2005). *Community-engaged scholarship toolkit*. Seattle: Community-Campus Partnerships for Health.  
<http://www.communityengagedscholarship.info>.
- Commission on Community-Engaged Scholarship in the Health Professions. (2005). *Linking scholarship and communities: Report of the Commission on Community-Engaged Scholarship in the Health Professions*. Seattle: Community-Campus Partnerships for Health.
- Gibson, C. M., (2006). *Report on New Times Demand New Scholarship: Research Universities and Civic Engagement: A Leadership Agenda*. Tufts University and Campus Compact.
- Glassick, C. E., Huber, M. T., & Maeroff, G. (1997). *Scholarship assessed: Evaluation of the professoriate*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Jordan, C. (Ed.). (2007). *Community-Engaged Scholarship Review, Promotion & Tenure Package*. Peer Review Workgroup, Community-Engaged Scholarship for Health Collaborative, Community-Campus Partnerships for Health.  
(<http://www.communityengagedscholarship.info>)

O'Meara, K. A. & Edgerton, R. (Eds.) (2005). *Faculty priorities reconsidered: Rewarding multiple forms of scholarship*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.