
Editorial: York Symposium on the Scholarship of Engagement

David Phipps & Steve Gaetz
York University

Jane Wedlock
United Way York Region

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Over the past several years, community engagement has emerged as a priority for universities. Many institutions now try to frame themselves as “an engaged university,” suggesting a different way of doing business. But what do such universities mean by this?

Community engagement can be framed under teaching, research, or service priorities (or any combination thereof), and such engagement can be supported by local, national, and/or international networks. Examples of Canadian support for local community university initiatives include the Institute for Community Engaged Scholarship (University of Guelph), Services aux Collectivités (Université du Québec à Montréal), and the Harris Centre (Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador). There are national networks supporting engagement, such as Community Based Research Canada, Canadian Alliance for Community Service Learning, Community Campus Collaborations Initiative, and ResearchImpact-RéseauImpactRecherche. There are also international networks seeking to build capacity for community engagement, such as the Living Knowledge Network, Global Alliance for Community Engaged Research, and the Global University Network for Innovation.

York University actively supports researchers and students participating in engaged scholarship. Faculty(ies) working in a truly interdisciplinary manner support engagement because communities do not live in disciplinary silos. Interdisciplinarity and active support of engagement are two elements that set the scholarship of the York University apart.

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David Phipps is Executive Director, Research & Innovation Services, York University. Email: dphipps@yorku.ca.

Steve Gaetz is Associate Professor, Faculty of Education, York University. Email: sgaetz@yorku.ca.

Jane Wedlock is Community Engagement and Research Manager, United Way, York Region. Email: jwedlock@uwyr.on.ca.

At York, the work of the many engaged scholars and their community partners is regarded as particularly important and considered to be rigorous scholarship. At the same time, this scholarship seeks to create impact by nurturing relationships beyond the walls of academe and engaging in innovative strategies to communicate and disseminate results to audiences beyond academia, whether this means community members, service providers, or decision-makers in government who shape policy, legislation, and practice.

Like our colleagues at Guelph, Memorial, and UQAM, as well as others, York's Knowledge Mobilization Unit builds capacity for engaged scholarship by working with faculty members, students, and community partners through a variety of services that facilitate the two-way connection between community and campus. Exemplifying this reciprocal connection, York University has deep relationships with the United Way York Region (UWYR), which prioritizes research, community engagement, and knowledge mobilization as a framework for understanding underlying causes of social issues, and building and investing in social infrastructure.

Complementing the practice of engaged scholarship is the scholarship of engagement, which is the theme of this special edition. In his landmark paper, "The Scholarship of Engagement," Ernest Boyer (1996) concluded that, "ultimately the scholarship of engagement also means creating a special climate in which the academic and civic cultures communicate more continuously and more creatively with each other" (p. 20). Engaged scholars and their partners have come to realize not only that their practices are innovative, but also that there is a need to explore scholarly engagement from a critical perspective in order to better understand the processes and outcomes of this work. There is a need to critically reflect on the nature of the relationships that have been nurtured to support the co-creation of knowledge, to understand innovation in knowledge mobilization, and to assess the degree to which we can truly make the claim of research impact.

This was the focus of the York Symposium on the Scholarship of Engagement. Supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), the symposium was held on October 2, 2013. The symposium sought papers that explored the processes, politics and networks involved in engaged scholarship. It featured 80 faculty, student, and community and Knowledge Mobilization staff presenting two keynote addresses, five posters and 14 papers, seven of which were selected for publishing in this special edition of *Scholarly & Research Communication*. Also included are seven Research Snapshot clear language research summaries that York's Knowledge Mobilization Unit produced for each article.

The seven papers selected for publication were written by researchers from six different disciplines at York: Education, Social Work, Psychology, Engineering, Law and Film Studies. Most authors are university-based and are "engaged scholars." The symposium asked them to take a critical look at their engagement practices and to become scholars of engagement. Some authors looked at the politics of engagement both at a local and international level. Nicol, Mulé, and Gates-Gasse looked at international perspectives on Lesbian, Gay Bisexual, and Transgendered (LGBT) human rights with academic and community co-lead teams in Africa, the Caribbean, India and Canada. Hynie and

McGrath also took an international perspective on the politics of engagement, working with the Refugee Research Network, and found that power differences (North/South) recapitulated local power differences (university/community). The issues of power and identity were explored by Mulé, Lowik, Teixeira, Hudler, and Hader who wrote about the multiple roles of research, community partner, and activist played by both academic and non-academic research collaborators. Mosher, Levesque, Appiah, and Anucha used the term “entanglement” to describe youth and adult researchers working in community and university settings in the NOISE project.

The importance of relationships as key to knowledge mobilization and engaged scholarship is a theme that is illustrated in all articles but particularly in the articles by Nichols and Gaetz, who reflect on the Canadian Homelessness Research Network, and by Baljko and Hamdi, who write about using the services of York’s Knowledge Mobilization Unit to engage stakeholders early in the process of developing assistive technologies. Gaetz explored a variety of design tools to broaden the reach of scholarship and to engage a broader audience. Trust and reciprocity are key to relationships and thus also to successful engaged scholarship that seeks to make a positive change, which Mosher and colleagues define as the impact of research.

But relationships need to be reciprocal and they need to be “authentic.” In this context, being authentic requires a willingness to reflect, acknowledge, and include the different realities of community partners, the often complex contexts within which they work, their need for adaptation to shifting circumstances, and consideration of how they will benefit as partners in scholarly endeavours. In order to work as equal partners, there is a need for clarity in understanding each other’s interests; the resources required to support involvement; a willingness to share power, and to recognize strengths and the importance of leveraging community knowledge. With such authentic relationships in place, collaborations between engaged scholars and community can be transformational. For example, United Way York Region was a co-applicant on the SSHRC grant that funded the symposium, and non-academic partners had an active voice in designing and contributing to the York Symposium for the Scholarship of Engagement. Nevertheless, old habits die-hard and are reinforced by structures that prevent authentic participation of community partners. Even though all the academic authors on these papers would describe themselves as engaged scholars, only three of the papers in this special edition were co-authored with non-academic partners. University researchers working as engaged scholars need to create truly authentic partnerships with non-academic collaborators and engage them not only as co-applicants on grants but also as co-authors on publications. Similarly non-academic collaborators require the time, the resources, and the support to allow them to become equal partners in scholarship.

Also included in this special edition is a Field Note by Melanie Barwick and colleagues, including three from York University. While not a part of the York Symposium on the Scholarship of Engagement, this article explores the intersections of communication and knowledge mobilization. Clear communication among community and campus partners is a hallmark of successful research partnerships. Knowledge mobilization is an increasingly professionalized practice that seeks to support campus collaborations. Drawing on their own experience, the authors explore some of the

practices that underpin successful collaborations as described in other articles in this special edition.

York University has a rich history of engaged scholarship and support by a Knowledge Mobilization Unit with professional knowledge brokers. Studying the scholarship of engagement is the third leg of this stool and helps to fulfil the university's Strategic Research Plan that identified the Scholarship of Socially Engaged Research as one of five opportunities for strategic development. Linking scholarship, practice and engagement creates a pan-university culture that is expressed through research, teaching, and service. This culture of engagement is critically assessed and is well described by the articles in this special edition.

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