

Reviews / Comptes rendus

The Community Engagement and Service Mission of Universities

edited by Patricia Inman and Hans G. Schuetze
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The Community Engagement and Service Mission of Universities is “a collection of papers from a conference hosted by PASCAL International Observatory and the Centre for Policy Studies in Higher Education and Training at the University of British Columbia in May 2009” (p. 1). One of the main goals of PASCAL is to promote a greater role for universities in regional community development, so it is not surprising that almost half of the 18 papers focus on universities and regional development. The rest of the papers address other forms of engaged research and learning. However, there is one notable absence. While “continuing education is,” as Budd Hall and Lise Bérubé note in their chapter, “the grandmother of all forms of community engagement and arguably still represents the deepest set of community partnerships” (p. 281), there is almost no discussion of continuing education in this collection.

Many of the papers are directly linked to PASCAL’s Universities and Region Engagement (PURE) Project. For example, Chris Duke draws on the PASCAL PURE project to examine the complexity and difficulties of region-level public sector partnerships and why these partnerships are so often frustrated. David Charles, Paul Benneworth, Cheryl Conway, and Lynne Humphrey examine evaluation and benchmarking and present a tool used by the PURE Project to measure the regional contributions of universities. While these and the other papers on regional community development will be of most interest to researchers, practitioners, and policy-makers in the field, they do, taken together, provide a good overview of current issues in this area. I especially appreciated the inclusion of Kathryn Mohrman’s paper, which provides brief descriptions of regional development projects involving 15 universities from seven countries and clearly draws out some of the common elements as well as the wide variety of issues and challenges.

The second part of the collection shifts to other forms of engaged research and learning as practised at universities in North America. Case studies include UBC’s Learning Exchange, located in the Downtown Eastside of the city (Margo Fryer); the Office of Community-Based Research at the University of Victoria, BC (Budd Hall and Lise Bérubé); the Rural Mexico Program (Hugo Gutierrez and Nora Guzman); and participatory research in Aboriginal communities (Seth Agbo). These studies and the other papers in this section should be of interest to a

broader audience given the current focus on community-based research and service learning at many universities across Canada and the United States. As the editors note, "The authors do not only showcase successful examples of community service and engagement but the whole spectrum of the 'good, the bad and the ugly'" (p. 6).

Threaded throughout this collection is an emerging debate about how the university can best engage with and serve the community. The rise of the so-called "third mission" (the community service mission) is often traced back to the founding of the land-grant universities in the United States (although Robert Gleeson challenges this origin story in this collection). As the editors note, "Participants [at the conference] argued that while regional and community engagement is often regarded as, and called, a 'third mission,' this term would suggest in fact a marginalized status of university engagement. . . . Rather than a 'third' mission, this relationship and these activities should be an inherent part of the first and second mission [teaching and research]" (p. 2).

As James Randall shows, language related to community engagement or community service is found in most faculty collective agreements at Canadian universities, although it plays a relatively minor role in faculty reward systems. Whatever the current reality and challenges (and many papers in this collection describe the difficulties faculty face in getting appropriate recognition for community-based research and other community engagement activities), it is clear that there is a move within North American universities to "de-marginalize" the "third mission" by making community engagement integral to all the university's activities.

What is the significance of this for continuing education? Given that continuing education is the part of the university most often identified with the community engagement and service function, any shift in the relationship between teaching, research, and community service could have a significant impact on continuing education. At the very least, this collection encourages us to think more about and participate in current discussions and debates about community engagement and the service mission of the university.

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