

# 6

*As a baseline for evaluation and assessment, an interdisciplinary cohort of graduate students collaboratively identifies and explicates the central concepts and objectives of public scholarship in this chapter.*

## An Explication of Public Scholarship Objectives

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During fall semester 2004 eight graduate students from five disciplines were identified and brought together by the Public Scholarship Associates at Penn State to learn collaboratively about public scholarship, an emergent educational philosophy that seemed to match our professional interests. To these preprofessionals interested in both advancing academic careers and developing civic habits, public scholarship appeared to promise the best of both worlds. Through public scholarship, we could perhaps avoid identities split by the gulf between the polis and the ivory tower. Our greatest dilemma, it seemed, was truly understanding what “this public scholarship thing” was. As a group we had a lot of heart but no specific charge—and certainly no concise definition of our object of study.

After attempting, unsuccessfully, to develop an evaluation instrument to “test” the outcomes of public scholarship on students’ affective and cognitive development, we turned our collective energies toward a necessarily prior step: identifying—or explicating (Chaffee, 1991)—the core dimensions of public scholarship as offered by the Public Scholarship Associates: democracy, public good, social responsibility, diversity, transference of discipline knowledge, and ownership of education. In this chapter we present an overview of these core identifiers as a necessary baseline investigation for future research, evaluation, and assessment of the impact of public scholarship on student learning.



## Democracy

Education and democracy have been coupled in the United States since even before its founding by what can be described as a Deweyan sense of democracy—“an entire way of life, rather than a form of government” (Rosen, 1995, p. 35), a life in which citizens are participants in “voluntary activity on the behalf of collective ends” (Flanagan, 2004, p. 9). To a large extent, Americans look to education, both K–12 and collegiate, to “nurture democratic dispositions and competencies in younger generations” (Flanagan, 2004, p. 1). Educational philosophers and practitioners argue that an educated public is a fundamental prerequisite to an effectively functioning democracy. A democratic society requires an actively engaged and an intelligently educated populace, capable of entering into critical dialogue about and collaborative evaluation of controversial issues. As Harry Boyte notes in his essay “Taking Democracy Seriously” (2005), Thomas Jefferson called on higher education to shape and preserve democracy. Jefferson said, “I know of no safe repository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves. If we think them not enlightened enough to exercise control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion by education” (Ford, 1905, p. 278). Alexander Meiklejohn shared Jefferson’s judgment of the role of higher education in preserving a fair and just society: “The voters, therefore, must be made as wise as possible. The welfare of the community requires that those who decide issues shall understand them. . . . If they fail, [democracy] fails” (1948, p. 26). A democracy necessarily depends on a well-educated citizenry.

Public education in America is contextualized in a democratic state “a particular social ideal” (Dewey, 1944, p. 115)—and as such, is expected to develop in students the skills, attitudes, and knowledge necessary to participate in democratic discourses and actions. As Dewey wrote, “A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience” (p. 101). Although Dewey never outlines explicit skills necessary for democracy (Ehrlich, 1997), Dewey does suggest that a “democratic society is a collaborative, interactive one in which individuals continuously learn from each other in making the whole more than the sum of the parts” (Ehrlich, 1997, p. 233). If students are to be trained or equipped for lifelong civic engagement, democratic education, by definition, must nurture common values, abilities, and understandings (Ehrlich, 1997) as well as active participation in public life, trustworthiness, and reciprocity (Putnam, 2000).

Public scholarship embraces and advances the responsibility of higher education to build and sustain an informed democracy. Lappé and DuBois (1994) encourage students to “live democracy” in their thinking and actions in both their public and private lives. Public scholarship initiatives support learning in community contexts and teach students to engage in the public

sphere by using their knowledge to effect positive change. Moreover, public scholarship encourages students to move beyond resignation, protest, and self-sacrifice—Americans’ default forms of engagement—and pioneer new, innovative ways to address pressing local, national, and global issues. To the extent that universities prepare students for their roles as engaged citizens, they are enabling our nation to realize the democratic ideal.

## Public Good

The belief that education is itself a public good is rooted in American democratic thought and governmental policies and proclamations. The nineteenth century bore witness to the revolutionary 1862 and 1890 Morrill Land-Grant Acts, which provided direct governmental support to higher education, increasing the breadth of study and access to all social classes nationwide. Applied and practical studies, such as agriculture, mechanical arts, and home economics, were added to the classical studies of a traditional liberal arts education. Higher education, as President Lincoln asserted, is “built on behalf of the people, who have invested in these public institutions their hopes, their support, and their confidence.” Higher education remained a government-protected good in the twentieth century with the passing of the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act (1944), Civil Rights Act (1964), Higher Education Act of 1965 (which authorized most federal student financial aid programs, including the Educational Opportunity Grant Program and the Guaranteed Student Loan Program), Title IX (1972), and the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990).

The commitment to government support of higher education as a public good, however, has recently come into question. “Apparently [a] growing public consensus [exists] that education is simply another commodity, another market for consumers, in which students are customers” (Kellogg Commission, 2000, p. 4). Federal support for public universities is declining, effectively forcing public institutions to act more like private universities—“replacing limited state resources of revenue with private dollars in the form of tuition increases, while mounting aggressive capital fundraising campaigns unprecedented in their scope and scale” (p. 4). Despite diminished state and federal support, institutions of higher education continue to support public needs, offering professional training and job retraining, doing advanced theoretical and applied research, examining leadership development, providing economic analysis, and offering opportunities for lifelong learning. Flanagan (2004; Chapter Four, this volume) argues that most Americans continue to endorse the public role of higher education, as evidenced by a national survey released by the *Chronicle of Higher Education* in March 2004, in which “preparing students to be responsible citizens” and “preparing future leaders of society” were ranked as the highest purpose for collegiate education (87 percent and 88 percent, respectively), after “preparing undergraduates for a

career” (92 percent) (Selingo, 2004, p. 1). Diminished state and federal financial support of higher education in recent years has not necessarily diminished the responsibility assigned to academe by the American people.

Public scholarship practices discredit critics’ arguments that education is no longer a public good. The “civic professionalism” (Sullivan, cited in Peters, Jordan, Adamek, and Alter, 2004, p. 4) that is advocated and practiced by public scholars places the needs of the public at the forefront of education, highlighting and reinforcing the idea that knowledge is necessary for the advancement of the public. Public scholarship provides citizen-scholars with the experiences, skills, and confidence necessary to move beyond mere reflection and into action, as Paulo Freire (2000) suggests, in order to transform society.

## **Social Responsibility**

The character trait of social responsibility is distinct from similar concepts, such as empathy, altruism, and prosocial behavior (Gallay, 2005). Social responsibility, briefly defined, is one’s sense of duty or obligation to the welfare of others, whereas altruism is the motivation (Batson, 1991), empathy the arousal (Hoffman, 1990), and prosocial behaviors the actions (Carlo and others, 1991) that characterize socially responsible persons. Socially responsible attitudes and behaviors can be learned and practiced in the university setting, as suggested by recent additions to accreditation requirements such as ABET (Accrediting Board of Engineering Technology), which has added categories of “ethical awareness,” “diversity,” and “social responsibility” to the traditional suite of technical expertise-based competencies (“Sustaining the Change,” 2004, p. 3).

Though the roots of social responsibility begin relatively early in life with empathy and can be seen in early adolescence, young adulthood is an important developmental stage in which to foster attitudes of social responsibility; young adults, particularly those in college, have greater autonomy and time to explore value orientations, identities, and their purpose in life (see Chapter Four, this volume; Flanagan, 1998). Indeed, although political beliefs do not crystallize until the third decade of life, they are rooted in young adulthood (Jennings, 1989). Public scholarship challenges college students to broaden their identities to include a public self. As political views are embedded in social relations, as well as one’s perceptions of others in society (Flanagan, 2004), college students who interact with others who hold alternative perspectives will be better prepared to work in a pluralistic democracy. Contextualized educational experiences and engagement with diverse peoples and perspectives are important in developing students’ sense of social responsibility. Studies on service learning, a precursor to public scholarship, suggest that young adults who engage in such activities are more likely to maintain a sense of social responsibility over their life span (Chapter Four, this volume;

Flanagan, 2004; Scales, Blyth, Berkas, and Kielsmeier, 2000). Public scholarship introduces students to public communities requiring diverse interactions, a practice that has been demonstrated to increase ability and comfort in working with others. Even more importantly, such interactions help students develop the desire to become more socially responsible.

## **Diversity**

The United States enjoys a wealth of diversity both in thought and in culture. Sometime near the year 2050, the collective “minority” population will become the majority, introducing not only cultural changes but also new perspectives in education, businesses, and society at large. Such significant demographic change is necessarily accompanied by important academic, moral, civic, and economic changes as well (Musil and others, 1999). No doubt, college graduates will be challenged by a society that is increasingly diverse in race, culture, and values (Pascarella and others, 1996) and will require increased awareness, understanding, respect, and acceptance of diverse perspectives. In addition to demographic changes (for example, race, ethnicity, gender, age) students will encounter and must be prepared to work with those with different sexual orientations, socioeconomic status, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs, and ideologies (“University of Maryland Definition of Diversity,” 1995).

According to Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, and Gurin (2002), democracy outcomes include perspective-taking, citizenship engagement, racial and cultural understanding, and judgment of the compatibility among different groups. For authentic multicultural understanding to occur, universities must expose students to people of diverse backgrounds and perspectives through admissions processes, but in addition faculty must purposefully facilitate their dialogue and encourage collaboration in the classroom environment. Students exposed to diverse environments are better able to participate in America’s democratic process because they understand multiple perspectives; they also display superior intellectual motivation, cognitive development, and growth in academic skills. These findings reinforce the importance of developing an educational environment among faculty, students, and the community that emphasizes diversity.

Public scholarship maintains as one of its objectives playing a significant role in developing citizens who are able to contribute effectively in a democratic society while acknowledging the construct of diversity that is interwoven in democracy. Public scholarship encourages an increased level of civic engagement among students and faculty. It is imperative that universities engaging in public scholarship address issues of diversity not only by helping students become more reflective, informed, and engaged citizens but also by educating them to be sensitive to the different dimensions of diversity that exist in society.

## Transference of Discipline Knowledge

The Yale Report of 1828 is an early example of the academy's traditional assumptions of knowledge transfer, particularly from one subject to another, or from scholarly work to applied contexts. Early educators assumed that rigorous academics, such as classical studies of Latin, for example, "disciplined" the mind, while the subject content provided the "furniture of the mind." Of the two, discipline was the most essential intellectual development. Early tutors and instructors relied on independent study and recitation as primary teaching practices to develop the intellect of their students. Differing from this traditional understanding of discipline and context, however, John Dewey (1944), argued for a more applied pedagogy moving away from "static, cold storage" (p. 186) to creative and flexible forms in which students encounter genuine problems and where connections are made between cognition and consequence.

Advances in educational and cognitive research have improved the scientific understanding of how learning occurs. Modern theories of learning and transfer continue to emphasize individual study and practice, but they also specify the kinds of practice that are important and take learner characteristics, such as existing knowledge and strategies, into account. Bransford, Brown, and Cocking (2002, p. 53) suggest four key characteristics that facilitate learning transfer from one area of study to multiple applications: (1) "Initial learning is necessary for transfer, and a considerable amount is known about the kinds of learning experiences that transfer." (2) "Knowledge that is overly contextualized can reduce transfer, abstract representations of knowledge can help promote transfer." (3) "Transfer is best viewed as an active, dynamic process rather than a passive end product of a particular set of learning experiences." (4) "All new learning involves transfer based on previous learning, and this fact has important implications for the design of instruction that helps students learn." In short, for the transference of discipline knowledge to occur, learners must first gain foundational knowledge and then actively apply it to problems in a context different from the one in which it was originally learned.

Public scholarship may promote the transference of discipline knowledge because it presupposes the foundational knowledge and academic rigor of the discipline while modifying the context in which theories were originally learned, thus encouraging adaptation, abstraction, and flexibility in student learning. Learning that occurs in the "high ground" of a strictly academic environment is limited to "manageable problems [that] lend themselves to solution through the use of research-based theory and technique. In the swampy lowlands [in which public scholarship resides] problems are messy and confusing and incapable of technical solution" (Schön, 1995, p. 28). At the heart of public scholarship is the "recognition that the most important thing you can know is not knowable through your relationship

with other scholars” (p. 37) but rather in the context of publics with complex characteristics and constraints. Public scholarship draws knowledge out of disciplinary boxes ensconced in the ivory tower into the swampy lowlands that require multiple perspectives for diverse and complex audiences.

## Ownership of Education

Like a rose that can be called by any other name, *ownership of education*, the term used by the Public Scholarship Associates, is also known as *autonomous learning* (Thomas and Rohwer, 1986), as well as *intentional learning* (Bereiter and Scardamalia, 1989; Francis, Mulder, and Stark, 1995). A sense of agency and responsibility for one’s own educational attainment—that students should intentionally choose their educational goals, content, and path—is at the core of these constructs. Francis, Mulder, and Stark (1995) suggest that an intentional learner is one “with self-directed purpose, intending and choosing that he will learn and how he will learn and what he will learn” (p. 13). Intentional learners “have learning as a goal, rather than an incidental outcome” (Bereiter and Scardamalia, 1989, p. 363). Intentional learners exhibit the following attributes: “*questioning*—facts, theories, experiences; wanting to learn; asking independent questions about what is to be known; *organizing*—ideas, meaning, knowledge; developing understanding of what is learned; *connecting*—new knowledge with old; integrating what is learned into a broader pattern of understanding; *reflecting*—on what, how, and why they are learning; understanding their learning needs and strategies; and *adapting*—to new situations and needs; using what is learned in a changing world or profession” (Francis, Mulder, and Stark, 1995, chap. 2). Responsibility for one’s own learning can be fostered through student- and faculty-constructed plans for academic work as well as instructional practices that require students to use information resources outside of the classroom (Stark and Lattuca, 1997). The intentional learning process requires faculty to mentor students similarly to how they mentor their colleagues, to enhance and expand their analytical thinking and engage in creative self-discovery, as well as to question, organize, connect, reflect, and adapt knowledge to their own mental models (Francis, Mulder, and Stark, 1995).

Students’ ability to take ownership of their education is an important construct in public scholarship. White and Cohen (2004) argue that students should be required to participate actively in the construction of their education by providing a rationale for choosing which courses they take in their general education program. They assert that if students are required to take shared responsibility for their education, we may “gain better-informed citizens who would give the challenges facing contemporary society the same deliberate attention they gave to understanding how they educated themselves and why” (White and Cohen, 2004, p. 10). Similarly,

the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities (2000) suggests that students must take responsibility for their intellectual growth, which will develop over their lifetime. Public scholarship encourages students to accept their responsibility in this process and allows them to become the wise and informed citizens that Meiklejohn (1948) called for in our democratic society.

## Conclusion

Public scholarship is the response of concerned academics to answer the charge of the Association of American Colleges (1985) to “enable the American people to live responsibly and joyfully, fulfilling their promise as individual humans and their obligations as democratic citizens” (p. 15). Through the practice of public scholarship, individuals become critically conscious members of society capable of creating and transforming the world around them.

Although the initial interest of the graduate student group at Penn State University was to assess the emerging method of public scholarship, the group soon recognized the need for a clearer understanding of the method and its key constructs: democracy, public good, social responsibility, diversity, transference of knowledge, and ownership of education. Through a careful explication of these concepts, students, faculty, and administrators will gain a greater understanding of public scholarship.

In conducting this research, the graduate student group hopes to elucidate a form of scholarship that encourages current and future professors to become integrated professionals who are involved in all areas (that is, teaching, research, and service) of their academic work, and recognize the civic obligation to engage higher education in scholarship that serves the public. The constructs that have been identified as necessary components of public scholarship exemplify the complexity of this method. Schön (1995) describes scholarship as swampy lowlands where problems remain messy, unclear, and complex. Public scholarship recognizes this complexity and approaches the conduct of scholarly work as an inseparable whole that relies on an interdisciplinary approach to engage students, faculty, and community partners in the democratic process.

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