Chapter 6

Administrative Perspectives on Implementing a Mandatory Engaged Scholarship Project With Doctoral Students

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ABSTRACT

This chapter focuses on lessons learned from mandating community-engaged scholarship research projects for all doctoral students within a specific college of education prior to beginning their dissertations. Members of the administration of the college participated in semi-structured interviews that focused on capturing their thoughts about the 2 years in which a small group of faculty and students piloted the initiative. During the interviews, the administrators shared their perceptions and what they believed to be the varied reactions of both faculty and students who participated in the community engagement project. The chapter provides insights that may be useful for others wanting to initiate similar community engagement initiatives with doctoral students.

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INTRODUCTION

Boyer’s (1990) *Scholarship Reconsidered* led to broader conceptualizations of academic scholarship itself and, thus, a stronger integration of faculty research and student learning into the life of communities outside the academy. Within this movement, Boyer’s (1996) scholarly work on the *scholarship of engagement* has influenced the concept of engaged scholarship and research. As Sandmann (2008) stated, “Engaged scholarship has evolved as a distinct dimension of the engagement movement and is evolving a distinctive scholarly expression and architecture” (p. 97). In essence, Boyer’s (1996) conception of engagement for higher education is the establishment of reciprocal partnerships between institutions and their extended communities.

The number of institutions receiving the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification indicates increasing numbers of institutions of higher education (IHEs) are requiring students to participate in community-based projects (Saltmarsh & Driscoll, 2015). Service-learning projects in undergraduate courses are an effective way to introduce university students to community engagement. Engaging in community-based research projects yields benefits for both university students and community partners (e.g., Checkoway, 2015; Klentzin & Wierzbowski-Kwiatkowski, 2013). As Paynter (2014) indicated, for students these benefits include experience relevant to “future work-related duties and assignments” (p. 48).

Morin, Jaeger, and O’Meara (2016) have advocated for assessing educational outcomes and finding innovative ways to increase community engagement opportunities for graduate students. Likewise, O’Meara and Jaeger (2006) noted, “Each department and discipline must ascertain what integrating engagement into their doctoral programs should look like and find critical experiences and windows that make the most sense for the content and framework of that discipline” (p. 5). According to Sandmann (2008), “Engagement, the concept of ‘scholarship of engagement’ (SOE) has evolved, becoming differentiated into a multifaceted field. For example, this term may refer to outreach, public service, civic engagement, community engagement, participatory action research, and even community development” (p. 92). We have chosen to use community engagement scholarship (CES) to remain consistent with the terminology of the College’s strategic plan.

BACKGROUND

Many scholarly research projects are the result of first determining a research question and then finding a location at which to conduct the research. The dean of the college of education featured in this study believed that graduate students should take a different approach: collaborative research partnerships in which they partnered with a community organization that would help to determine the research topic. Students would apply their knowledge and research skills in collaboratively helping their community partner address problems and issues. The dean called on faculty to support these projects, thereby promoting in the college “a culture that reinforces the democratization of knowledge, integrating more fully with community partners, and advancing open and action-oriented community relationships” (Fitzgerald, Bruns, Sonka, Furco, & Swanson, 2016, p. 247).

This chapter evaluates one college of education’s effort to promote CES experiences for all doctoral students. The research team consisted of one faculty member and two former doctoral students who had earned their degrees in the college. Data for this study was obtained during semi-structured interviews with administrators of the college. Doctoral students at this college had to complete a community en-