

Shaun O'Malley  
Inquiry Project - Proposal

In 1996, Ernest Boyer wrote in his work “Scholarship of Engagement,” published in The Journal of Public Service and Outreach, that the role that higher education has played a major role in America in facilitating needed skills, necessary ideas, and educated people to help carry out important missions for the betterment of the country. Boyer explains that previously universities have “challenged the established order,” or acted as “both as conscience and social critic” in the service of the United States.

Boyer gives much praise to higher education but calls for more action, “The academy must become a more vigorous partner in the search for answers to our most pressing social, civic, economic and moral problems and must affirm its historic commitment to what I call the scholarship of engagement.” To often in today’s world of higher education, the focus has shifted from collaborative learning and engagement to individualized research and a focus on the professoriate which Boyer mentions focusing too much on “tenure” and credentialing “while the overall work of the academy does not seem particularly relevant to the national’s most pressing civil, social, economic and moral problems.”

Boyer proposes a paradigm shift, as outlined in the Carnegie Foundation report, “Scholarship Reconsidered,” that there needs to be “scholarship of discovering knowledge, the scholarship of integrating knowledge to avoid pedantry, and the sharing of knowledge to avoid discontinuity, but also for the application of knowledge, to avoid irrelevance.” In this shift, scholarship of engagement is the need to connect “the rich resources of the university to our most pressing social, civic and ethical problems, to our children, to our schools, to our teachers, and to our cities.”

The notion of engaged scholarship has become a major focus for many institutions. Penn State University is a founding member of the Engagement Scholarship Consortium, which according to Penn State Outreach is “a nonprofit educational organization aimed at working collaboratively to build strong university-community partnerships anchored in the rigor of scholarship and designed to help build community capacity.”

At the very core of Engaged Scholarship, the Pennsylvania State University has stated that engaged scholarship, “in the broadest sense...is out-of-classroom experiences that complement classroom learning.” And the goal of Engaged Scholarship is to “cultivate vibrant relationships between faculty, staff, and students and the local, state, national, and global communities we serve.” With that in mind, for my inquiry project, I want to examine this notion of Engaged Scholarship and its overall importance to the institution and to the overall learning of the student. Questions I would like to address are: 1) How does Engaged Scholarship benefit the student; and 2) How does engaged scholarship benefit the institution.

In order to answer these two questions, I plan on interviewing students that have participated in Penn State Engaged Scholarship experiences and faculty/staff members who are leading the charge on Engaged Scholarship at Penn State.

Scholarship of Engagement by Ernest Boyers  
Russell Jacoby “The Last Intellectuals”  
Scholarship Reconsidered – Carnegie Foundation  
Engagement Scholarship Consortium  
Engaged Scholarship – PSU Outreach and Online Education