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Formative Assessment of Engaged Scholarship: A Student Perspective

What kind of service would you expect if you were paying anywhere from \$15,000-\$40,000 a year for something? Would you expect any change from year to year if the cost of that service increased \$500-\$1,000 every year? That is exactly what is happening today with Higher Education. According to the College Board, trends in college tuition pricing shows that tuition has increased steadily over the past 30 years. In Trends in College Pricing, published by the College Board in 2013 shows that the average tuition costs from 1983 to 2014 for private non-profit four-year institutions rose by 153% (from \$11,909 to \$30,094). These trends also show that similar increases have occurred at public institutions with an increase of 231% (\$2,684 to \$8,893) (Trends in College Pricing, 2013).

The first institution of Higher Education was the University of Bologna in 1088. That is 926 years ago, however education has still remained largely the same. Students attend class, listen to the professor lecture, complete out-of-class assignments and reading, and are assessed based upon how well they retained or “learned” the information. A lot of education is based upon rote memorization and recalling the details that were gained from the reading. With the rise in college tuition, students are starting to ask questions about education and these questions could change the very nature of Higher Education. Questions like, “Why is tuition so expensive,” or “Can learning occur outside the classroom and if so, do I need to pay for a college education?” There is a lot of research about the future of Higher Education and trends in Higher Education from Massive Online Open Courses, competency based learning and digital badging, but what I believe is truly important is changing the paradigm of how students learn.

Northeastern University's third annual national survey on issues in Higher Education revealed some interesting facts. The survey interviews c-suite executives (CEO's, CFO's, COO's, etc) on various topics inside Higher Education. From the survey, 73% of C-suite executives felt that there is a skills gap among today's U.S. workforce and 87% of these executives felt that most college graduates lack critical skills to be successful in today job environment. Furthermore, 97% of these executives felt that what is needed in Higher Education was to incorporate experiential learning into the curriculum.

Experiential education is not a new concept in Higher Education, but Ernest Boyer made one of the best arguments for experiential education in 1990 with his work, “Scholarship

Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate” and in his work, “Scholarship of Engagement,” which was published in the Journal of Public Service and Outreach in 1996. Boyer stated Higher Education has played a major role in America in facilitating needed skills, necessary ideas, and educating 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 “both as conscience and social critic” in the service of the United States (Boyer, 1996).

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” (Boyer, 1996) Too 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 nation’s most pressing civil, social, economic and moral problems.” By focusing on credentialing, Boyer feels that this does not adequately reward the professorate, but more importantly the student and the nation loses out (Boyer, 1990).

Boyer says, “At no time in our history has the need been greater for connecting the work of the academy to the social and environmental challenges beyond the campus” (Boyer 1990). Boyer’s call for “engaged scholarship” then is a call for a paradigm shift in how professors teach, “to break out of the tired old teaching versus research debate and define, in more creative ways, what it means to be a scholar” (Boyer, 1990). Boyer believes that in order to establish engaged scholarship, there needs to be a focus on the “scholarship of discovery, integration, application and teaching,” with the hope that a new discussion will be created in which the very nature of scholarship is debated and that colleges and universities will be “less imitative, taking pride in their uniqueness” (Boyer, 1990).

Boyer establishes that “scholarship” needs to be defined by an institution’s individual mission and values and that “the reality is that on many campuses standards of scholarship have become increasingly restrictive,” and the priorities of universities have become more “imitative than distinctive,” (Boyer, 1990). The question Boyer suggests is, how can an institution of higher education, “define, with clarity, its own special purposes” (Boyer, 1990).

As Boyer traces scholarship through three distinct periods of higher education, he explains how each came to exist. The first period of Higher Education in America really reflected upon the Colonial Traditions of the time. The original institutions focused on developing the student, building character and preparing new civically engaged leaders (Boyer,

1990). Later in the 1800's, education transitioned its focus to building a nation (Boyer, 1990). The nation required builders and technicians and engineers and farmers. It is because of these needs, that education became more liberal. Land granting institutions started teaching an assortment of subjects as the importance of higher education switched to providing a "service" to the country (Boyer, 1990). Through land granting institutions, Boyer noted "applied research," was developed as noted by social critic Lincoln Steffens when visiting Madison, Wisconsin in 1909, "In Wisconsin the university is as close to the intelligent farmer as his pig-pen or his tool-house" (Boyer, 1990).

It is through "hands on" learning opportunities that a student can truly learn theory by turning it into practice. In the mid-19th century, Boyer says that institutions started focusing on scientific exploration. In the early phases, the focus was closely connected to hands on learning as explained in an anecdote about Maria Mitchell, an astronomer who set up an observatory on the lonely Nantucket Island and through his hands on observations, discovered a new comet in 1847. Boyer explains that by the mid-nineteenth century, more credence was given to the scientific process, which changed the focus of education again, creating a professorate that focuses on research, publication and a commitment to the profession rather than educating undergraduate students (Boyer, 1990).

Throughout Boyer's work, Boyer notes that engaged scholarship needs to be a collaborative effort, connecting faculty, students, staff, and the community to provide a quality level of "service" that will enhance student learning. Faculty members need to be given freedom and creativity to truly "engage" students instead of being restricted by a faulty measure of success based upon publication and research.

Engaged Scholarship has become an important topic around the country. Many institutions of higher learning are creating engagement centers that are connecting engaged scholarship opportunities across the country. For my inquiry project, I have decided to do a formative assessment of Engaged Scholarship. A majority of the research on Engaged Scholarship focus on several key factors, the first being how can faculty members use engaged scholarship opportunities to help secure tenured positions at institutions, secondly, how to develop new teaching methods that fall within the realm of Boyer's 4 applications of scholarship, thirdly how do institutions incorporate engaged scholarship into their curriculum. With little actual evidence, especially from the student perspective, I wanted to develop a study that would ask students if they had an engaged scholarship opportunity in their undergraduate education and if so, how did this opportunity help foster their learning.

The Survey

Since institutions are investing large amounts of resources on the theory of Engaged Scholarship and finding ways to incorporate Engaged Scholarship into their practice, I think it is extremely important to first gauge from students if Engaged Scholarship is beneficial. I created a survey using Google Documents and sent it out through various social media platforms asking friends, family and connections who have attended an institution of higher education to comment on several questions regarding Engaged Scholarship. I gave a brief definition of Engaged Scholarship so that all participants had the same knowledge of Engaged Scholarship. The definition stated,

“Engaged Scholarship is the scholarship of teaching, research, and creative accomplishment, as well as service that involves citizens and the University working in partnership to create and apply knowledge that addresses pressing societal issues and strengthens civic responsibility and democracy through mutually beneficial relationships. **In the broadest sense, engaged scholarship is out-of-classroom experiences (Study Abroad, Immersion Programs, Service Learning, Internships, Projects, etc) that complement classroom learning.”

The survey was open for four days. At the end of the four days, forty people had participated in the survey and answered the following questions:

- 1) Please Describe your gender;**
- 2) What institution did you attend;**
- 3) Based upon the definition above, did you have an Engaged Scholarship experience while completing your college degree;**
- 4) What year were you in school when you had your Engaged Scholarship experience;**
- 5) Please describe your Engaged Scholarship Experience;**
- 6) How do you feel your Engaged Scholarship experience helped foster your learning;**
- 7) What important lessons or qualities did you learn from your experience;**
- 8) Would you recommend more Engaged Scholarship experiences for students in the future, Yes or No, and why do you feel this way.**

The Results

Out of the 40 participants in the survey, 29 (72.5%) identified as being female and 11 (27.5%) identified as being male. From the survey participants, 28 (70%) said they had an Engaged Scholarship experience in their undergraduate career and 12 (30%) said they did not experience engaged scholarship.

There was some variation among the 40 participants as to when they had their Engaged Scholarship experience. Please see Table 1.

Year in School	Number of Responses	Percentage
Freshman Year	6	12.24%
Sophomore Year	13	26.53%
Junior Year	15	30.61%
Senior Year	13	26.53%
2 nd Senior Year	1	2.04%
Graduate School	1	2.04%

Several students had several Engaged Scholarship experiences during their educational career. 12 (30%) students reported having zero Engaged Scholarship Experiences, 16 (40%) students reported having one Engaged Scholarship experience, 7 (17.5%) students reported having two Engaged Scholarship experiences, 2 (5%) students reporting having 3 Engaged Scholarship experiences, 2 (5%) students reported having 4 Engaged Scholarship experiences and 1 (2.5%) student reported having 5 Engaged Scholarship experiences.

Of the 40 participants, there seemed to be a general enthusiasm for Engaged Scholarship opportunities with 32 (80%) students recommending Engaged Scholarship opportunities for the future and 8 (20%) students not recommending Engaged Scholarship opportunities. It is important to note that 1 participant noted that there are benefits to engaged scholarship stating, “I would recommend engaged scholarship insofar as teaching in the humanities one really comes to know the human condition when you're involved with particular women and men” however they did express some level of reluctance stating, “I do wonder sometimes if engaged scholarship risks forming people in the basic, fundamental ideas of their discipline at the expense of forming activists.”

I asked participants to describe the type of Engaged Scholarship experience that they had. Based upon the responses, I broke it down into 9 different categories. Please see Table 2.

Type of Experience	Number of Participants	Percentage
Internship/Study Abroad	7	14.29%
Internship (Domestic)	16	36.73%
Work Experiences	6	12.24%
Service Learning	8	16.33%
Cooperative Education (Co-op)	2	4.08%
In Class Experiences	3	6.12%
Immersion Programs (1 to 2 weeks)	3	6.12%
Online “Buddy Pal” Program	1	2.04%
Conference Presentation	1	2.04%

The next two questions were open-ended questions because I really wanted the participants to be honest and candid about their experiences with Engaged Scholarship. However after analyzing the results, I have decided that the answers for both of these questions are very similar and that I probably should have eliminated question number six. So for the sake of presenting the research, I did a cross examination of both questions six and seven and made a list of skills or lessons that were gained from Engaged Scholarship opportunities. If the lesson was repeated in question six and seven, I only counted it once per person. See Table 3.

Table 3 - What important lessons or qualities did you learn from your experience		
Lessons/Qualities Learned	Number of Participants	Percentage
Retaining Knowledge	2	2.74%
Practical Application	16	21.92%
Networking and Communication	9	12.33%
Diversity	10	13.7%
Career Placement/Vocational Discernment	8	10.96%
Idea Development/Creativity/Vision	1	1.37%
Civic Engagement	5	6.85%
Skills Development	22	30.14%
- Self Advocacy/Independence	2	
- Critical Thinking	3	
- Honesty	1	
- Resilience	3	
- Patience	3	
- Time Management	3	
- Event Management/Planning	1	
- Reflective Practice	1	
- Flexibility	3	
- Decision Making	1	
- Responsibility	1	

Students were also asked which institution they attended where they had these Engaged Scholarship experiences. The participants had attended 24 different institutions from large institutions to small institutions, from land granting public to small private liberal arts institutions and even online institutions. Please see table 4.

Table 4 – Institution Attended			
Institution Attended	Number of Participants	YES (Had Experience)	NO (Did not have Experience)
University of California Santa Barbara	1		1
Maryville College, Maryville Tennessee	4	4	
University of Maine in Machias, Maine	4	2	2
Berry College, Rome, Georgia	1	1	

University of Tennessee, Knoxville	1	1	
Eastern Kentucky University, Richmond, Kentucky	1	1	
Pennsylvania State University, University Park PA,	10	7	3
University of Notre Dame, South Bend, Indiana	2	1	1
University of Phoenix	1		1
University of North Texas	1	1	
Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, NC	1	1	
Saint Joseph College, Rensselaer, IN	1	1	
Pellissippi State Community College, Knoxville, TN	1		1
Texas Women's University, Dallas TX	1		1
Westfield State University, Westfield Massachusetts	1	1	
Assumption College, Worcester, Massachusetts	1	1	
Aquinas College, Grand Rapids Michigan	1		1
Eastern University, Philadelphia, PA	1	1	
University of Southern Florida, Tampa, Florida	1	1	
Bucknell University, Lewisburg, PA	1	1	
Middle Tennessee State University, Mufreesboro, TN	1		1
Wittenberg University, Springfield, Ohio	1	1	
Kennebec Valley Community College	1	1	
Vatterott	1	1	

After conducting a formative assessment on Engaged Scholarship, it seems that, at least from the student perspective, Engaged Scholarship is beneficial to help foster learning. I think there are some interesting points that need to be made from the data. Going back to the study conducted of C-suite executives by Northeastern University, I think that the information assessed does show that Engaged Scholarship is important and beneficial for its students and that it is consistent with why C-suite executives feel the need for “experiential learning” opportunities. I also think that when you examine some of the most important lessons/qualities learned from these engaged scholarship opportunities, it is clear that Engaged Scholarship opportunities really help with practical application (theory to practice) fostering a deeper understanding through these hands on experiences. There is also a lot of skills development that comes from these Engaged Scholarship experiences such as networking, communication, various skills development, a value and appreciation of diversity and a discernment of career placement/vocation.

More research can clearly be done on Engaged Scholarship and I think that in the future a survey of this nature could also examine persistence and motivation. From the responses received, Engaged Scholarship seems to have a pretty positive effect so how does that positive effect keep someone from dropping out of school or how can it be used to motivate a student to

complete their work. Another area for improvement is to increase the data set and collect more information from students.

Although Engaged Scholarship was born out of a notion to motivate professors to be more engaging in their instruction to students and not worry about tenure requirements and how “engaged scholarship” experiences factor into credentialing of a professor, I think it is important to note the benefits that Engaged Scholarship can have on the entire institution, the community and the students that are a part of the experience.

Works Cited

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