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Welcome to JoSE

Welcome to JoSE: The SUNY Journal of the Scholarship of Engagement. As one of JoSE's co-founders and managing editors, I am pleased indeed to join my colleague John Suarez in the launch of the only open-access scholarly journal dedicated to the SUNY applied learning community.

As the first of its kind, JoSE provides a multimodal platform for sharing applied learning and engagement resources, in turn strengthening SUNY's inter-institutional and inter-community connections. JoSE also serves as a forum for developing new approaches to applied learning and for assessing ongoing and past projects.

By setting out JoSE's origins and aims in these editorial prefaces to JoSE's first regular issue (June 2020), John and I seek to explain JoSE's relationship to the SUNY vision of applied learning, to contextualize JoSE relative to the larger realm of engaged scholarship, and to invite you to become part of JoSE as a contributor and reader.

Engagement

In the 1990s, service-learning programs and projects spread rapidly throughout American higher-education institutions (HEI), an event that some have attributed to a reaction against the materialism of the 1980s (Smilie, 2019, n.p.). As the number of service-learning programs increased, scholarship kept pace, and from the combined groundswell of practical and theoretical developments the idea of the “engaged university” was born (Adamuti-Trache & Hayle, 2015, p. 73). A 1999 Kellogg Commission report describes engaged universities as having “redesigned their teaching, research, and extension and service functions to become even more sympathetically and productively involved with their communities, however communities may be defined” (qtd. in Adamuti-Trache & Hayle, 2015, p. 73).

A key contributor to the Kellogg Foundation's work, Ernest Boyer was also a leading education and service-learning scholar during the 70s, 80s and 90s. Boyer wrote extensively on the theoretical purposes and practical logistics of service learning and the ways in which he understood its transformative potential in higher education.¹ In 1990's *Scholarship Reconsidered*, Boyer set out four aims of the engaged professoriate: discovery, integration, application, and teaching (p. xii). Across all four aims, Boyer emphasizes boundary-spanning work—relationship-building between academic and extra-academic communities—as an essential feature of engagement. For Boyer, these relationships begin with a basic change in pedagogical values, from the banking model famously challenged by Freire (1996) to one in which students, teachers, and community members become autonomous partners in higher education.

¹ A selection of Boyer's relevant work includes: *The Monday Morning Imagination: Report from the Boyer Workshop on State University Systems* (1976); *Higher Learning in the Nation's Service* (1981); *A Quest for Common Learning: The Aims of General Education* (1981); *College: The Undergraduate Experience in America* (1987); *Ready to Learn: A Mandate for the Nation* (1991); *Cornerstones for a New Century* (1992).

In Boyer's model, reciprocity among all learning partners is key. The back-and-forth flow implied by his model counteracts the view that service learning is a linear process. To Boyer, one-way linearity in service learning is a mistake because it suggests that knowledge is first 'discovered' and then 'applied.' The process we have in mind is far more dynamic. New intellectual understandings can arise out of the very act of application—whether in medical diagnosis, serving clients in psychotherapy, shaping public policy, creating an architectural design or working with the public schools. In activities such as these, theory and practice vitally interact, and one renews the other. (1990. p.23)

Boyer's work is notable not only because of its considerable contribution to engagement but also because it coincided with other significant contemporaneous developments in the new field. Boyer's emphases on reciprocal relationships, the vital interaction of theory with practice, and the avoidance of a one-way, close-ended flow of knowledge helped set the stage for "critical service learning." By the mid- to late-90s there was an increasing emphasis on engagement's potential as part of critical pedagogies aimed at making positive changes to social problems rooted in structural iniquity (Johnson & Notah, 1999; Kahne & Westheimer, 1996). Dissatisfied with one-time or short-term activities with primary goals focused on pragmatic solutions to concrete community problems, many engagement scholars began (and continue) to advocate for engagement, or critical service learning, as a field whose activities support efforts at long-term political change and social justice (Barrera et al., 2016; Mitchell, 2007; Mitchell, 2008; Santiago-Ortiz, 2019; Wade, 2001).

Engagement Challenges: Labor, Infrastructure, Meaningfulness

Like service learning in the 1990s, in this century, engagement has been taken-up enthusiastically in HEI, resulting in mushrooming numbers of projects and programs (Johnson & Hoovler, 2015). Despite engagement's many practical benefits and good intentions, however, classroom practitioners and institutional administrators must also find ways to manage its not-insignificant difficulties. Labor requirements, infrastructure issues, and the obligation to meaningfulness are three of the major challenges that must be addressed in order to develop and maintain active, positive cultures of engagement.

Relative to the investment of labor, in the same issue of *The Umbrella* discussed above, Maggie Keef (SUNY Buffalo) notes that managing applied learning projects—especially relationship-building—takes considerable time and energy (Dec. 2019, p. 12). In emphasizing the labor-intensive but necessary relationship building that goes into fostering community partners, Keef identifies a theme often discussed in the scholarship of engagement (California State University—Monterey Bay, 2014; Carlson & Biemiller, 2019; Hammerlinck & Plaut, 2014; Jacoby, 2015; Jones, 2003; Jones & Palmerton, 2010; Scheibel, Bowley & Jones, 2005; Stoecker & Tryon, 2009).

A potential solution to the labor problem identified by Keef is offered by Pigza and Troppe, who advocate for an infrastructure model in which strongly reciprocal community-HEI relationships balance the relationship-building load more equitably (2003, p. 113). Still, perceptions about asymmetrical workloads may discourage many potential or new faculty practitioners from developing projects or staying with applied learning; at the other end of the

spectrum, Pearl notes that burn-out may become a problem for experienced practitioners (2018, p.7).

In addition to the demands involved in sustaining the external infrastructures provided by solid relationships with community partners, SUNY's own research shows that inadequate internal infrastructures may also currently impose limitations on SUNY's explicit goal of applied learning expansion.² In the world of applied learning/engagement, internal infrastructure is usually taken to mean the internal HEI resources—people, units, schools, or departments—devoted to the project, as well as the operational models resulting from their efforts (Jacoby, 2015, p. 70-71). In our moment, when competition for institutional resources can be fierce, petitioning for infrastructure resources can become yet another time-intensive and under-recognized task.

Internal infrastructures also include data collection and reporting, activities which have traditionally been the responsibility of the academic partner. This point is underscored by the third of SUNY's 2015 resolutions, which makes data collection and reporting an institutional responsibility.³ Combined with relationship-building work, the labor involved in collection and reporting can result in a disproportionate workload, especially for adjunct faculty. Connected to the question of the reporting workload are professional recognition issues, for the relationship of engagement activities to professional recognition is sometimes ambiguous. Engagement scholars point out that despite energetically publicizing their commitments to engagement, many HEIs continue to favor traditional teaching and research over engagement activities in their reward systems (O'Meara, Lounder & Hodges, 2013).

The final challenge is related to what may well be engagement's fundamental goal: meaningfulness. To be credible, engagement activities must increase resources for all partners while avoiding redundant, unnecessary, or gratuitous applications that do little to benefit anyone. Ironically, the current push for expansion risks breeding fragmentation and alienation in countless scattered applied learning cells and exploited, exhausted community partners. As a result, growth without careful oversight may result in a supermarket-like "grab-n-go" culture, reinforcing at the same time the deficit model of engagement in which academic practitioners swoop-in, *deus-ex-machina*, to "fix" broken community partners. Jacoby (2015) warns that "Too many communities have complained about being used as "learning laboratories" or having been "partnered to death" by a well-meaning university" (p. 51).

² See <https://www.suny.edu/media/suny/content-assets/documents/applied-learning/SUNY-Applied-Learning-Plan.pdf>: "Many campuses noted a lack of infrastructure, including tools for data collection and reporting, currently decentralized programs, lack faculty and staff time and resources for overseeing applied learning, lack transportation for students to off-campus sites and other infrastructure challenges posed by credit caps."

³ See <https://www.suny.edu/about/leadership/board-of-trustees/meetings/webcastdocs/Tab%205%20-%20Experiential%20-%20Applied%20Learning%20Plan.pdf>: "Resolved that such plan shall include a requirement for collecting and reporting data associated with such experiential or applied learning activities . . ."

Applied Learning across SUNY

In 2015, SUNY endorsed five resolutions designed to ensure that every student had at least one applied learning experience before graduation.⁴ Aware that these experiences can have many iterations, SUNY developed a series of tools designed to both articulate a unified official vision across its many institutions and help faculty incorporate SUNY-approved applied learning pedagogies.⁵ Among the resources that SUNY developed, the following definition is a cornerstone:

Applied learning refers to an educational approach whereby students learn by engaging in direct application of skills, theories and models. Students apply knowledge and skills gained from traditional classroom learning to hands-on and/or real-world settings, creative projects or independent or directed research, and in turn apply what is gained from the applied experience to academic learning. The applied learning activity can occur outside of the traditional classroom experience and/or be embedded as part of a course.⁶

As does the history of service-learning writ large, SUNY's 21st-century definition owes much to Dewey's early-20th-century models of learning and service, and in particular to the emphasis Dewey placed on educative (as opposed to "mis-educative") experiences that are both salutary and catalyzing in terms of their effects on the student's later positive growth (1938/1953, p. 25-29). Too, SUNY's emphasis on reflection as a key "leverage point" (Wagner et al., 2015, p.11) also owes much to Dewey's definition of reflection, in which a student's "active, persistent, and careful consideration" is crucial for fostering a capacity for evidence-based, rational thought (1933, p.9).

SUNY claims that in scale and breadth there is no other state or system in the U.S. that can equal its commitment to applied learning (Wagner et al, 2015, p. v). Indeed, the evidence is impressive:

- In 2018-2019, 103 527 SUNY students participated in 25 853 applied learning projects; another 11 000 benefitted from course-based internships
- every SUNY campus has an Applied Learning team
- 40% of all registered SUNY programs require an approved applied learning experience⁷

The advantages students gain from such experiences are an essential part of the rationale for SUNY's commitment. In the December 2019 issue of *The Umbrella*, SUNY's official

⁴ See <https://www.suny.edu/about/leadership/board-of-trustees/meetings/webcastdocs/Tab%205%20-%20Experiential%20-%20Applied%20Learning%20Plan.pdf>

⁵ "SUNY's applied learning initiatives include work-based activities, e.g., co-ops, internships, work study, and clinical placement (SUNY Works); community-based activities, e.g., service learning, community service, and civic engagement (SUNY Serves); and discovery-based activities, e.g., research, entrepreneurship, field study, and study abroad (SUNY Discovers)" (Wagner et al. 2015, p. v).

⁶ See: <https://www.suny.edu/media/suny/content-assets/documents/applied-learning/AppliedLearning-Definitions.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.suny.edu/applied-learning/>

applied learning newsletter, Chancellor Kristina M. Johnson refers to provisional SUNY-based research suggesting that students who have applied learning experiences earn higher annual salaries after they graduate: \$8,000 more in business, administration and public policy; \$16,000 more in communication and visual and performing arts fields; and up to \$23,000 more in STEM fields (p. 2).⁸ There are also organizational benefits. In aiming to “increase student retention and degree completion and to improve graduate employment outcomes” (Wagner et al., 2015, p.2), SUNY clearly seeks to cultivate enrolment across its 64 member institutions.

Most of SUNY’s public focus, however, is directed to the advantages SUNY’s applied learning programs offer students. Alongside the tangible incentive of better graduation prospects, many practitioners point to the intangible rewards associated with applied learning. Remarking that experiential learning is a “cornerstone” in her vision for a SUNY in which all students have “an individualized educational experience that is uniquely theirs”, Chancellor Johnson also notes that “the real world is often the best classroom of all” (*The Umbrella*, Dec. 2019, p.2). Supporting the “real world” claim for better learning, some analyses indicate that “learning how to act” when in community settings can foster better communication skills, a deeper understanding of what it takes to be practically useful, and a new awareness of the complexity of social problems (DeLuca, Andrews & Hale, 2004; Moely & Ilustre, 2019).

JoSE

Creating and maintaining applied learning projects that are viable over the long-run and that seek to build actually useful partnerships means that we practitioners must show the same dedication to reflection and innovation as we demand of our students. While SUNY addresses challenges connected to meaningfulness in the development of standards designed to nurture “‘good’ or ‘effective’ or ‘relevant’ learning” (Wagner et al., 2015, p. 9, emphasis original), the nature of applied learning means that such measures must be actively promoted and supported at the administrative level over the long-term. Given the complex nature of the challenges implicit in applied learning and engagement, no quick fixes present themselves. Fortunately, however, many dedicated engagement scholars are creating pathways to productive, long-term change. Some of these positive developments take place in knowledge-sharing organizations aimed at helping practitioners develop better “listening with” skills.⁹ Others are supported by the emergence of scholarly journals dedicated to assessing, reporting, and sharing resources and knowledge about engagement.

Sandmann et al. write that academic journals devoted to engagement have several important functions (2008, p. 162). Most obviously, journals give practitioners publication opportunities. Being published, in turn, assists individuals in promotion and tenure efforts; documenting the projects and people publishing specifically in engagement also helps improve

⁸ Figures based on provisional analysis of data collected done by the Associate Provost’s office for SUNY Institutional Research and Data Analytics (personal correspondence T. Foster, Jan. 2, 2020).

⁹ For example, Bringing Theory to Practice’s PLACE Collaboratory (Partnerships for Listening and Action by Communities and Educators): <https://www.aacu.org/press/press-releases/bringing-theory-practice-launches-partnerships-listening-and-action-communities>

institutional recording and reporting. Next, peer-reviewed journals dedicated to the scholarship of engagement also provide all-important professional education, including focused resources and examples. Third, journals help establish criteria that define the standards for rigor and credibility in applied learning projects.

In these ways, peer-reviewed journals like JoSE may ease the labor demands built-in to applied learning by minimizing the time that faculty spend re-inventing the wheels of start-up and evaluation. By helping to legitimize and promote knowledge about the engagement cause in SUNY, JoSE also serves as an advocacy tool for improvements to infrastructure. Finally, JoSE provides a window into the processes of engagement, including not just the practical but also the theoretical work shared by faculty, students, and community partners. In the spirit of the second of Boyer's aims, integration, and following his vision for engagement as field in which the pragmatic and the abstract co-exist (1990, p. 16), JoSE advances and supports the co-constructive, mutually beneficial relationship between theory and practice.

The rich confluence of practice with theory will also inform JoSE as a space for critical reflection. While we in the SUNY community of practice speak with pride about the scope and diversity of our applied learning plan, we are also well served when we make rigorous inquiries into the ways in which our projects could be reshaped in their application--the third of Boyer's categories. The integration to which Boyer refers not only strengthens existing practitioner communities but also helps to legitimize and promote engagement work beyond the core groups of dedicated faculty, thus aiding in recognition and reward efforts. A quality assurance tool, JoSE provides essential feedback pathways and supports sound, feasible advancements in best practices standards. As our engagement colleagues Alan Melchior and Cathy Burack, editors for *The International Journal of Research on Service-Learning and Community Engagement*, write, a signal part of an engagement journal's mission is to provide a space for critical examination of the ways in which we think about, execute, and report our field (2013, np).

The fourth of Boyer's aims, teaching, aims to support best-practices standards among practitioners. Journals play a critical role in doing so, for as Boyer writes, "The scholarship of integration also means interpretation, fitting one's own research—or the research of others—into larger intellectual patterns" (1990, p. 19). Because JoSE welcomes submissions by students as well as faculty and community partners, the larger intellectual pattern realized in JoSE's policies is one in which experimentation is encouraged. In particular, JoSE helps challenge traditional assumptions about what it means to teach, to "do" research and to participate in knowledge-production. By their very nature, engagement activities create dynamic relationships among all participants. Who teaches today may be the student tomorrow; how knowledge is created, used, and to whom it is attributed is equally fluid. At its core, engagement is intrinsically boundary-spanning, and as a teaching-research field it is as much obligated to extra-disciplinary acknowledgement as it is to interdisciplinary collaboration.

As editors, our individual visions for JoSE have been shaped by our unique experiences with, and understandings of, the purposes, best practices, and future of applied learning and engaged scholarship. In common, however, we're committed to creating a digital exchange dedicated to all things applied learning, in which all of us in the SUNY community can trade ideas, learn about new projects, and make new connections. Though we have few illusions about the work our vision for JoSE will entail, we believe it is worthwhile, for as Plater (1999) observed: "The professional service and outreach faculty will never be honored as legitimate scholarly work until the hard, pragmatic task of documenting this form of applied academic scholarship is completed" (p. 191). With JoSE, we hope to offer a way in which practitioners

new and experienced may make discoveries, apply new strategies, integrate new methodologies, and refine their teaching experiences. In JoSE we seek to mobilize existing SUNY-approved applied learning definitions and contribute to the expansion of SUNY's applied learning plan, while supporting an informed, frank, and active conversation about challenges and limitations. We see JoSE as a multi-modal platform dedicated as much to fresh-thinking about the future directions of engagement as it is to critical examinations of its history. JoSE exists to support the development of a community of authors and readers comprised not just of academic faculty and administrators, but also of students and community partners. We look forward to meeting you.

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