



EDUCATING FOR CITIZENSHIP AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Practices For Community Engagement At Research Universities

Edited by Tania D. Mitchell And Krista M. Soria

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Tania D. Mitchell • Krista M. Soria
Editors

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Editors

Tania D. Mitchell
College of Education and Human
Development
University of Minnesota Twin Cities
Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

Krista M. Soria
University of Minnesota
Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

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*For T. Aaron Hans and Michael Paradise, whose support and
unconditional love were paramount to this undertaking.*

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Suzan Akin has worked with public service and engaged scholarship for over a decade. Most recently, she has served as the Assistant Director of the Public Service Center at the University of California, Berkeley, and as the Program Manager for the American Cultures Engaged Scholarship program. Suzan received her MEd from Harvard University's Graduate School of Education and has worked at several institutions advising student service organizations, coordinating campus-wide service projects, and working with faculty to develop service-learning and community-engaged scholarship courses.

Karen Andrade is a postdoctoral scholar at the University of California, Davis in the Department of Human Ecology. She is the program manager of the UC Davis Environmental Health Science (EHS) Center's Community, Outreach and Engagement Core (COEC). Her work helps ensure that the research the EHS Center's produces has strong and meaningful community engagement. Dr. Andrade is a recent graduate from UC Berkeley's Department of Environmental Science, Policy, and Management. Her current work is a continuation of a professional interest to build effective and accessible bridges between institutional scientific research and the research needs of community groups.

Joan Arches is a Professor of Youthwork and Community Engagement at the University of Massachusetts/Boston where she has been created numerous grant-funded service-learning partnerships promoting the pipeline to higher education, positive youth development, the educational opportunity gap, and youth agency. Her partnerships currently connect

her with the *Do the Write Thing* essay contest, The Boys & Girls Clubs of Dorchester, The Three Point Foundation, and the Attorney General's Office, *Got Ball: Anti-violence Curriculum*. Prof. Arches's passion for community-engaged scholarship has brought her as a Visiting Scholar to Australian Catholic University where she is currently an Honorary Adjunct Professor and as a Visiting Professor to the University of Western Sydney, Chaminade University of Honolulu, and DeMontfort University, Leicester, United Kingdom. In 2005, Prof. Arches received the University of Massachusetts President's Award for Public Service.

Mirtha Bailey is a higher education professional with over 16 years of experience in student support services. Mirtha has worked with various institutions with a primary emphasis on student achievement. She is currently serving as the Experiential Learning Coordinator for the School of Public Administration at the University of Central Florida. In this position, Mirtha utilizes her vast knowledge of student success strategies to cultivate experiential learning opportunities by collaborating with advisory board members, public and private organizations, and university stakeholders. Mirtha's primary goal is to ensure that, through professional development, students develop the necessary skill set, to become leaders in public service.

Lori L. Britt is an Associate Professor of Communication Studies and director at the Institute for Constructive Advocacy and Dialogue and 4C: Campus Community Civic Collaborative at James Madison University. Her research focuses on understanding how communities and organizations go about the business of charting future courses of action and how different communicative structures and participatory and collaborative practices can aid in making those plans more inclusive and representative of multiple stakeholders and perspectives. Britt has experience facilitating deliberation, dialogue, and visioning processes for community groups, government, and nonprofit agencies and teaches students those facilitation skills as a way to help students shape productive talk about challenging public issues.

Susan Browne holds a doctorate in Reading, Writing, and Literacy from the University of Pennsylvania. She is an Associate Professor in the Department of Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural Education at Rowan University. Dr. Browne advises the Undergraduate Reading Endorsement Program and teaches undergraduate and graduate reading courses. Dr. Browne's research interests and publications are in the areas of critical

pedagogy, urban education, multicultural literature, and reader response. She is a reviewer for *Children's Literature in Education* and is a guest lecturer at the University of Pennsylvania, where she teaches a graduate multicultural literature course. In the city of Camden, she and Dr. Marjorie Madden have conducted research at the Center for Family Services Head Start and the Family Success Center Literacy Program developed through a university-based partnership.

Sean Burns directs the Office of Undergraduate Research and Scholarships at the University of California, Berkeley where he also teaches courses on American history and culture. For his course Social Movements, Urban History, and the Politics of Memory, Burns was awarded the Chancellor's Faculty Civic Engagement Award (2014) and the American Cultures Teaching Innovation Award (2015). The course grows out of a long-term partnership with Bay Area community-history organization Shaping San Francisco. Burns earned his PhD in the History of Consciousness Department at UC Santa Cruz, and, prior to working at Cal, taught within UC Santa Cruz's Community Studies Department. His first book, a biography of Archie Green, was awarded the 2012 CLR James Book of the Year Award.

Lara Cushing is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Health Education at San Francisco State University. Her research focuses on the disproportionate health impacts of environmental pollutants in disadvantaged communities, and has investigated questions of environmental justice in the context of pollution sources, prenatal exposures to harmful chemicals, and climate change. She has over 10 years of experience working in the non-profit sector as a researcher, community organizer, and fundraiser and often collaborates with community-based organizations in her research. Dr. Cushing completed her doctorate at the University of California, Berkeley, where she was involved in several initiatives to foster community-engaged scholarship. This included work as a Chancellor's Public Fellow to launch a new undergraduate service-learning course in engineering, and helping to establish the UC Berkeley Science Shop.

Fatih Demiroz is an Assistant Professor of Public Administration at the Sam Houston State University. His research interests are disaster resilience, social and organizational networks, governance, and behavioral public administration. He has published in *Public Performance and Management Review*, *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, and *Disaster Prevention and Management*.

Vernette Doty is the Associate Director of the Office of Student Life and Civic Leadership at the University of California, Merced. She received her M.Ed. with emphasis on student development at Washington State University. For several years, she focused on academic community-based learning for disciplines campus-wide. At UC Merced, Vernette supports cocurricular community engagement in addition to academic community-based learning partnerships for the rapidly growing campus. Her goal is to build strong, reciprocal partnerships that develop student civic leaders and contribute to positive social change.

Zak Foste is a Postdoctoral Research Associate at the Ohio State University, where he works on the Interfaith Diversity Experiences & Attitudes Longitudinal Survey (IDEALS). His research focuses on whiteness in higher education, college men's identity development, and service-learning. Zak received his Master's in Student Affairs in Higher Education from Miami University (OH) and his PhD in Higher Education and Student Affairs from the Ohio State University.

Andrew Furco serves as the Associate Vice President for Public Engagement and Professor of Higher Education at the University of Minnesota. His research and publications explore various issues regarding the impact, implementation, and institutionalization of service-learning and community engagement in primary, secondary, and higher education in the USA and abroad. Prior to arriving in Minnesota, he worked at University of California, Berkeley (1994–2007) as a faculty member in the Graduate School of Education and as the university's director of the Service-Learning Research & Development Center and the International Center for the Study of Civic Engagement.

Cynthia Gordon da Cruz is a faculty member in the Justice, Community and Leadership Program at Saint Mary's College of California. Her research focuses on community-engaged scholarship, critical democratic citizenship, antiracism, critical race theory, and community organizing. She recently published a book chapter titled "Critical Democratic Citizenship: A Learning Outcome Model to Support Engaging for Justice." Previously, Gordon da Cruz has worked in multiple areas of higher education: leadership development, advising multicultural and student advocacy groups, and with the American Cultures Engaged Scholarship program at the University of California, Berkeley.

Melissa “mel” Dawn Gruver is the Associate Director for Civic Engagement & Leadership Development at Purdue University where she supervises a team of individuals committed to designing experiences and courses for Purdue students to develop their leadership and civic identities. With over a decade of experience in leadership education and community engagement, she is particularly interested in examining group-centered leadership within social movements and guiding students through the process of uncovering leadership in unlikely places and deconstructing the master narrative surrounding social change. mel is deeply involved in antiracist and intersectional feminist community organizing at a local and national level and has been named a Woman of Innovation (2015) for this work. She also designs curriculum for high school and college students to equip them to explore their personal politics and to prepare them to engage with the world as activists and change agents.

Brittany “Brie” Haupt is a Graduate Research Associate and Adjunct Faculty member at the University of Central Florida studying for a PhD in Public Affairs-Public Administration with an emphasis in Emergency Management. Her research interests include cultural competency, emergency management communication, community resilience, and competency-based education. She has published in *Public Administration Review*, *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, *Disaster Prevention and Management, Risk, Hazards, and Crisis in Public Policy*, *Journal of Emergency Management*, and *Frontiers in Communication Section on Disaster Communications*. In addition, she has presented at the American Society for Public Administration, the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management, and the Public Administration Research Conference, as well as presented for the Federal Emergency Management Agency on a case study created for diversity education related training.

Chi-kan Richard Hung is an Associate Professor at the University of Massachusetts Boston. His research interests include nonprofit organizations and community development, with a focus on immigrant populations. He has published in the areas of microfinance and life cycle issues of immigrant organizations in the U.S. metropolitan areas.

Naim Kapucu is Professor of Public Policy and Administration and Director of the School of Public Administration at the University of Central Florida. He chairs the Sections on Emergency and Crisis Management and Complexity and Network Studies of American Society

for Public Administration. His main research interests are emergency and crisis management, decision-making in complex environments, collaborative governance, and social inquiry and public policy. His work has been published in *Public Administration Review*, *Administration & Society*, *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, the *American Review of Public Administration*, and *Disasters*, among many others. He teaches network governance, public and nonprofit management, emergency and crisis management, research methods, and analytic techniques for public administration courses.

Touria Khannous is Associate Professor in the Department of Foreign Languages and the International Studies Program at Louisiana State University. Her research interests include African and Black diaspora studies, postcolonial studies, women studies, and films. She has published articles on African literature and film, women's cinema, as well as a manuscript on African women's literature, film, and internet discourse.

Mathew Lauer is an undergraduate student at the University of Minnesota, primarily studying critical cultural studies with a minor in community-based leadership. He is also a teaching assistant for the leadership minor and a research assistant in leadership.

Marjorie Madden brings over 30 years to the teaching of literacy. Associate Professor and former chair, Dr. Madden now teaches clinical courses in the undergraduate and graduate reading program at Rowan University. In addition to teaching, Dr. Madden codeveloped The Literacy Consortium, now in its 11th year. She has published four books for Scholastic; her most recent argues for student-centered literacy teaching in middle school classrooms. Dr. Madden's research interests include critical literacy, culturally responsive pedagogies, and language and literacy development in the young child. Her most recent research with Dr. Susan Browne focuses on literacy initiatives with urban Head Start preschool children and families in Camden, New Jersey.

Geoffrey Maruyama is a Professor and Chair of the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Minnesota. His research has focused on achievement processes in schools, on research methods for educational and other applied settings, and on action research approaches and engaged scholarship in challenged communities. He has written *Research Methods in Social Relations* (8th Edition, with Carey Ryan, 2014), *Basics of Structural Equation Modeling* (1998) and *Research in*

Educational Settings (with Stanley Deno, 1992), and numerous articles and chapters. He has held a number of administrative positions at Minnesota, including Vice Provost and Associate Vice President, and has been president and secretary treasurer of the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues.

Tania D. Mitchell is an Associate Professor of Higher Education at the University of Minnesota. Her teaching and research focuses on service-learning as a critical pedagogy to explore civic identity, social justice, student learning and development, race and racism, and community practice. Dr. Mitchell is a recipient of the Early Career Research Award from the International Association for Research in Service-Learning and Community Engagement (IARSLCE) and the American Fellowship from the American Association of University Women. She has written in numerous books and journals and is a co-editor of *Civic Engagement and Community Service at Research Universities: Engaging Undergraduates for Social Justice, Social Change, and Responsible Citizenship* (2016) and *The Cambridge Handbook of Service Learning and Community Engagement* (2017).

Kerri Leyda Nicoll is an Assistant Professor of Social Work at Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts (MCLA), the Commonwealth's public liberal arts college. She teaches courses on U.S. social policy, community organizing, and poverty and inequality and directs the Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Social Work's internship program. Kerri's primary research focuses on the ways that families living in or near poverty perceive and experience the public programs designed to assist them. She is also actively engaged in scholarship related to community engagement and political social work.

Charles Nies is the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs at the University of California Merced. He has served in that role for just over a year, but has been at UC Merced since August 2006. Charles' portfolio includes K-12 college readiness work throughout the central valley, admissions and enrollment, on-campus housing and dining, student life, activities, recreation and athletics, health and wellness, and learning support services. He has worked in higher education for 25 years in a variety of roles. He was the Dean of students at a small private college, a program director for a minor in leadership studies, and an Assistant Dean of an interdisciplinary school at a large public university. His area of research is leadership and social change.

Katie Richards-Schuster is an Assistant Professor at the University of Michigan School of Social Work. She is also the Founding Director of the Community Action and Social Change undergraduate minor and is the current Director of Undergraduate Minor Programs for the school. She teaches the foundation course for the CASC minor (Theories and Practices of Community Action and Social Change) and advance practice course in community organization. Her research focuses on youth empowerment and the processes of engaging young people in community action and social change.

Victoria Robinson is a lecturer at the University of California, Berkeley, in Ethnic Studies and Women's Studies, teaching courses addressing race and ethnicity in the United States and global female migrations. Her most recent area of research addresses the gendering of postindustrial return migrations to the Caribbean. At the University of California, Berkeley, as Director of the American Cultures Center, Victoria has continued to build the university's nationally recognized undergraduate diversity curriculum.

Colleen Rost-Banik is a doctoral candidate at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. With graduate degrees in sociology and world religions, Colleen approaches her work from a critical and interdisciplinary lens. Before pursuing a doctorate, she worked in higher education for over a decade at a variety of institutions in New England and Hawai'i. Her work has ranged from teaching and advising to coordinating service-learning and extracurricular programming. Colleen's current research explores how undergraduate students learn about and practice social justice, particularly as it relates to race, class, gender, and citizenship.

Mary C. Ruffolo is the Associate Dean for Education Programs and Collegiate Professor at the University of Michigan School of Social Work. Dr. Ruffolo teaches interpersonal social work practice courses and is the Principal Investigator of a HRSA training grant focusing on workforce development in integrated behavioral health and primary care. She is also involved in the development of MOOCs and other distance education programs. Her research areas are in mental health interventions and sustaining evidence-based practices in public mental health settings.

Anthony Scali is an undergraduate student studying sport management with a minor in leadership at the University of Minnesota. He has conducted research on students' integration into communities in higher education.

Leanna K. Smithberger is a doctoral student at the University of South Florida, and a former 4C: Campus and Community Civic Collaborative student-affiliate at James Madison University. She was a student in Dr. Britt's "Facilitating Community Engagement" course and was part of the first cohort of student facilitators from that course. Her research has focused on framing political issues deliberatively, specifically looking at how the National Issues Forum choice work framework is used to present value-laden issues at the national and local levels. Additional research has considered the mundane and extraordinary influence of American car culture and roads on how we live in and interact with environments, and the use of music composition and performance as a method of inquiry.

Wei Song is a PhD candidate in the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Minnesota. Her research focuses on exploring how adolescent social relations and capital facilitate or hinder adolescent social and emotional learning, especially capacity of self-control and social competencies. Recently, she has been actively engaged in community-based research and investigating the impact of different community-based programs on students' success in higher education.

Krista M. Soria works as an analyst with the Office of Institutional Research at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. Dr. Soria is interested in researching high-impact practices that promote undergraduates' development and success, the experiences of first-generation and working-class students in higher education, and programmatic efforts to enhance college students' leadership development, civic responsibility, and engagement in social change.

Gretchen E.L. Suess is Director of Evaluation at the Netter Center for Community Partnerships at the University of Pennsylvania (Penn). She is also a faculty in Penn's Department of Anthropology and a senior fellow in the Center for Public Health Initiatives. Dr. Suess has over 15 years of experience leading research and evaluation projects that have included multiyear qualitative, quantitative, mixed-method, and multidisciplinary projects. Projects are generally based on participatory-action research and collaborative team-based strategies. Her scholarship is motivated by a commitment to social justice, racial harmony, equality, and human rights with a focus on praxis and social transformation.

Nanette Archer Svenson is an adjunct professor at Tulane University and consultant for the UN and other international organizations. She

designed, launched, and directs the Panama programming for the Tulane Global Development Master's. Prior to this, she was instrumental in establishing the UNDP Regional Centre for Latin America and the Caribbean and headed its research and knowledge management efforts for four years. Nanette is based in Panama and her research focuses on capacity development, particularly for higher education, national government, and international organizations.

Ashton Wesner is a PhD candidate in UC Berkeley's Department of Environmental Science, Policy, and Management. Her scholarship intersects the fields of political ecology, feminist science and technology studies, and critical cultural studies. Her dissertation examines the complex relationships between natural resource industry and sciences, nation-state formation, and the politics of representation in the Pacific Northwest. She has worked as a graduate instructor in the American Cultures Engaged Scholarship course "Engineering, The Environment, and Society," and now serves as a Fellow in the Berkeley Connect mentorship program. Prior to pursuing her doctoral degree, Wesner worked with not-for-profit organizations in Oregon, Southern California, and Argentina on issues at the crux of environmental justice and community outreach.

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Introduction: Educating for Citizenship and Social Justice—Practices for Community Engagement at Research Universities

Tania D. Mitchell and Krista M. Soria

When it comes to educational practices and the work that would produce the kind of citizen that would best advance democracy, “no single conception emerges” (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004a, p. 238). Coll (2010) argued that our conceptions of citizenship are “neither uniform nor unified,” as we wrestle with the rights and benefits invoked by citizenship as a category of membership in contrast with the opportunities and responsibilities claimed through an exercise of citizenship as a dynamic and participatory process (p. 7). That community engagement practice in higher education aims to prepare students “for their roles as citizens in this globally engaged and extraordinarily diverse democracy,” requires we center the notions of citizenship and social justice as core concepts in our work (The National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, 2012, p. 29). Therefore, Westheimer and Kahne’s (2004a) question, “what kind of

T.D. Mitchell (✉)

College of Education and Human Development, University of Minnesota
Twin Cities, Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

K.M. Soria

University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN, USA

citizen?” remains important to thinking about the work of service-learning and community engagement at research universities (p. 237).

As Westheimer and Kahne (2004a) outlined their framework for three kinds of citizens (personally responsible, participatory, and justice-oriented), we see value in each variation. We need personally responsible citizens who obey laws, pay taxes, and recycle. Our society is better served when filled with participatory citizens who know and care how government works, who organize their neighborhoods to care for those in need, and who work to improve their communities. But our commitments are best envisioned by the justice orientation which holds that “citizens must question, debate, and change established systems and structures that reproduce patterns of injustice over time” (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004a, p. 240). This justice-oriented citizenship reflects Coll’s (2010) framing of citizenship as “a dynamic, intersubjective and contentious process” rather than a category of membership (p. 20). A justice-oriented approach to citizenship education through service-learning challenges students “to improve society by critically analyzing and addressing social issues and injustices” (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004a, p. 242) and envisions citizenship as “claimed through collective and collaborative action rooted in relationships of struggle” (Mitchell & Coll, 2017, p. 190).

The emergence of a community engagement practice emphasizing education for citizenship and social justice is not new. In a 1994 presentation for the National Society of Experiential Education, service-learning pioneer Nadinne Cruz defined this practice as “a process of integrating intention with action in the context of a movement toward a just relationship.” Eyler and Giles Jr. (1999) discovered that students’ value of social justice was impacted through service-learning courses. Moely, McFarland, Miron, Mercer, and Ilustre (2002) discovered that service-learning led to an increase in students’ awareness of social justice issues noting, “increase in a social justice perspective indicates increased awareness of social institutions, customs, and power distributions that contribute to poverty and injustice in society” (p. 23). Himley (2004) was attracted to service-learning because “it seemed to put in motion fundamental questions about social justice and the possible redistribution of symbolic and material resources” (p. 417).

The possibility that a more just practice may invoke more just outcomes was raised by Rhoads (1997) through an introduction of critical community service and again by Rosenberger (2000), who employed the term “critical service-learning.” In Rosenberger’s (2000) invocation,

service-learning becomes a practice through which we might “transform structural inequalities” (p. 29). Mitchell (2008) built on these ideas to operationalize a critical service-learning pedagogy as one that is “explicit” in its “social justice aim” through prioritizing a social change orientation, working to redistribute power, and developing authentic relationships (p. 50). These aspects of a critical service-learning pedagogy seek to actualize Cruz’s (1994) definition—aligning intention and action in a movement toward more just relationships.

Butin (2007) warned that “the service-learning movement finds itself with a rhetoric-reality gap” with regard to its efforts to connect community-engaged teaching to working for social justice (p. 179). The challenge to institutionalize social justice aims is difficult despite the “specific experiential strategies centered in the community that carefully and critically engage complex and contested issues” (p. 182). The inferred political nature of a social-justice approach can be read as radical or too liberal to be integrated into a larger engagement practice (Butin, 2007; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004a, 2004b). Further, “avoiding the very difficulty originally meant to be engaged” in order to be acceptable for the institution at large may dilute the practice in such a way that claims of a justice orientation may be meaningless (Butin, 2007, p. 178). That may, perhaps, explain why Westheimer and Kahne (2004a) find educational efforts to develop the justice-oriented citizen as “the least commonly pursued” (p. 242). The “vast majority” of service-learning programs “share an orientation toward volunteerism and charity and away from teaching about social movements, social transformation, and systemic change” (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004b, p. 243). Indeed, Mitchell and Soria (2016) found that only 3.1% of students in community engagement experiences characterized their service as social justice. Rather than pursuing social justice, “these programs privilege individual acts of compassion and kindness” (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004b, p. 243), leaving us unsurprised but still disappointed that 51.7% of students see their work as charity (Mitchell & Soria, 2016).

So what does it mean to educate for citizenship and social justice through community engagement? Like citizenship itself, these practices are “neither uniform nor unified.” Social justice remains a contested concept (Bell, 1997) and is often replaced with the language of diversity and inclusion where it gets performed through acts of celebration and tokenizing efforts centering the experiences of the most marginalized (Lazarus-Stewart, 2017). Rather than focusing on transformative work to address

inequality, service-learning gets positioned as an experience where a student can acquire “cultural capital by becoming the person who crosses borders and helps those less fortunate and has ‘fun’” (Himley, 2004, p. 421). This focus on individual development—especially when divorced from analyses of power and structural inequality—leaves unequal conditions intact and opportunities to effect meaningful and sustainable change unlikely.

Bell’s (1997) description of social justice, as requiring attention to both process and goal, brings recognition of just how challenging enacting a commitment to social justice through community engagement can be. Our work, if it claims to be a social justice practice, will only be fully realized when we live in a “society in which the distribution of resources is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure...[where] individuals are both self-determining (able to develop their full capacities), and interdependent (capable of interacting democratically with others)” (Bell, 1997, p. 3). It is a lot to ask of a single practice in higher education. So Cruz’s (1994) grace in her definition—that we are engaged in a process that will move us toward just relationship—creates time and opportunity for us to work collaboratively to understand how community engagement at research universities might contribute to a transformative movement for social justice.

The submissions to this volume help us understand how research universities have tried to bring about more just conditions through community engagement. These examples sometimes reveal the very best in our work, and sometimes remind us there is more work to do in research universities. The practices detailed here allow us insight into the transformative potential of community engagement and the limits of our efforts to truly bring about change. We see, in these contributions, efforts to “carefully and critically engage complex and contested issues” (Butin, 2007, p. 182), but also emphasize on charitable works and volunteerism that are at times inattentive to the structural concerns that perpetuate inequality. Thus, we see the contributions of this volume as juxtaposing the continuation of existing—and often limiting—conversations about community engagement in some instances and also a critical advancement of community engagement scholarship, discourse, and ideals in others.

It is our hope that readers of this volume will realize the urgent need for research universities to invest more efforts into educating students for citizenship and social justice. We also hope that readers will discover novel ways that faculty, staff, and leaders at research universities are engaging

their students in community and social justice efforts through structured academic and programmatic practices. We want to inspire readers to examine their own practices, institute new ideas, and explore new opportunities to engage students in their communities. Finally, we hope that readers will continue to develop a critical stance toward community engagement efforts that reinforce privilege, codify otherness, systematize inequalities, and reinforce the status quo.

In Chap. 2, Soria, Mitchell, Lauer, and Scali set a foundation that serves as a data-driven call to action for research universities to work more intentionally to develop citizenship and a commitment to social justice among their graduates. The authors analyzed two sets of college student survey data from research universities and found evidence that suggests significant numbers of college students graduate without gaining critical multicultural competencies and interpersonal skills, are not concerned with keeping abreast of social and community issues, and do not fully possess a strong commitment to community. These data provide a compelling case that research universities are not yet meeting their civic missions to graduate students who can serve as effective leaders in our pluralistic democracy.

We organized the next sections of the text to discuss course-based strategies that some authors have utilized to develop those critical competencies in students. In Chap. 3, Britt and Smithberger used autoethnographic and qualitative data that emerged from their experiences as instructor and student in the Facilitating Public Engagement Processes course at James Madison University. The authors highlight the outcomes for students' civic identity development and the outcomes for public life by providing examples of ways students at James Madison University have applied dialogic practices in the community to develop. Continuing along this theme, in Chap. 4, Burns discussed how transformation in a social movement history course at the University of California Berkeley led to deep learning about democracy, power, and political agency among students.

Similarly, in Chap. 5, Browne and Madden connected their students (preservice teachers in an early childhood literacy course at Rowan University) with teachers in a Head Start program to assess their preschool children's literacy development. The authors found that the experiences of working with diverse students helped their pre-service teachers to develop culturally-responsive pedagogies and begin to understand the real-world challenges and the possibilities of becoming culturally-responsive educators.

In Chaps. 3, 4, and 5, the authors explored opportunities to develop students' citizenship, civic identity, knowledge of social justice movements, and culturally-responsive pedagogies within university classes. In Chap. 6, Foste examined factors that may make it more challenging for a large contingent of college students—men—to engage in community service and service-learning courses. Foste undertook a qualitative study to examine the experiences of college men in service-learning programs and offers a conceptual roadmap for understanding the potential perceived tension between service and appropriate masculinity in college.

In Chap. 7, Khannous provides an overview of service-learning programs at Louisiana State University and an account of students' experiences in an international studies service-learning course. Khannous outlines the means through which the course cultivates students' capacity to be agents of change, by not only giving them the tools they need but also providing them with the motivation to remain engaged beyond their service-learning experience. In keeping with the academic program theme, in Chap. 8, Nicoll, Richards-Schuster, and Ruffolo provide an overview of the University of Michigan School of Social Work's Community Action and Social Change minor (CASC). The authors discovered that the sense of community developed in the minor, along with the space and guidance the minor provided for intensive reflection, enabled students to articulate their own conceptions of civic engagement and spurred them toward post-graduation community involvement.

To conclude this section about academic programs, in Chap. 9, Rost-Banik used postcolonial theory to examine White undergraduate service-learners' discourse regarding the stratifications that exist between them and the people with whom they engage at community sites. Rost-Banik suggests that these encounters generated a racial melancholia filled with the reproduction of White supremacy with the murmurings of postcolonial possibility wherein students question the systems and power dynamics that have given rise to their own social location.

To begin our next section, which focuses on programmatic opportunities to develop students' citizenship and commitment to social justice at research universities, in Chap. 10, Mitchell explores students' conceptions of social justice in The Citizen Scholars Program at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Mitchell examines when students' conceptualizations of social justice emerge, highlights elements of the curriculum that influence those patterns of thinking, and discusses how those understandings relate to traditional theorizing of social justice.

In Chap. 11, Andrade, Cushing, and Wesner discuss an environmentally-focused science shop established at the University of California, Berkeley as a case study in the movement to democratize scientific practices and facilitate engagement between communities, students, and academics. The authors argue that science shops can be used to cultivate undergraduates' sense of civic responsibility by helping to increase access to scientific knowledge and the capacity to create it among students *and* communities. The authors also found that engaging undergraduate students in experiential, project-based learning to address community-identified research needs can foster new models of knowledge production that empower communities as equal partners in the research process and increase student engagement in both social change and the scientific enterprise.

Continuing along the programmatic theme, in Chap. 12, Gruver discusses the outcomes of Purdue University students' engagement in an alternative break service program. Gruver outlines the nuances of the program and ways students participating in the Memphis spring break were encouraged to work toward their vision of social justice upon returning to the campus community. Similarly, in Chap. 13, Nies and Doty describe the outcomes of a student–university–community collaboration that unites the values of social change with student community action at the University of California, Merced. The authors found that many first-generation students who participated in the collaboration perceived their participation in postsecondary education as a sign of social change.

Next, in Chap. 14, Arches and Hung describe a partnership between a housing development and a community university-tutoring, mentoring, and youth enrichment program involving students from the University of Massachusetts, Boston. The authors discovered that participants consistently expressed greater appreciation of the knowledge and skills gained in organizing collective action to impact social change. The university students who were involved in the project also reported greater confidence in addressing community needs and recognizing policy issues. In Chap. 15, Haupt, Kapucu, Demiroz, and Bailey highlight an experiential learning model at the University of Central Florida as a way to facilitate service-learning projects and internships between graduate and undergraduate students and organizations in the local, state, and federal public service sector.

Concluding the programmatic theme, Maruyama, Furco, and Song highlight the Community Engagement Scholarship Program at the

University of Minnesota. The authors discovered that providing students more robust community-engagement experiences is likely to produce more positive outcomes, including outcomes to help underrepresented students become more successful in their educational endeavors.

Next, the volume shifts focus to university-wide measures to inspire students' development of citizenship and commitment to social justice. In Chap. 17, Soria and Mitchell explore whether various community service settings or different types of community service (e.g., with a student organization, on one's own, within work-study employment) were differentially associated with students' engagement in social justice in research universities. The authors discovered that multiple forms of community service yielded positive results with regard to the frequency with which students worked in collaboration with others to raise awareness and took action to address social problems.

In Chap. 18, Akin, Robinson, and Gordon da Cruz discuss the American Cultures Engaged Scholarship courses at the University of California, Berkeley, a unique collaboration that aims to develop undergraduates' civic and democratic capacities with a dual focus on community engagement and racial and social justice. The authors discovered that courses with above-average levels of inequality content led students to become more committed to participate civically with an orientation toward justice, to think actively and consider multiple perspectives, and to think about racial inequality from structural perspectives.

In Chap. 19, Svenson presents recent strategies at Tulane University that seek to strengthen and institutionalize this public-oriented and community-engagement mission, particularly for undergraduates' involvement in community service and social change. In Chap. 20, Suess discusses academically based community service courses at the University of Pennsylvania, which utilize the teaching and research capacity of the university to equip students to more broadly contribute to social transformation and resolve social inequalities. Suess discovered that the program courses were positively associated with an increase in students' reporting an understanding of the critical needs and issues that exist in the community/neighborhood where they served, their knowledge about the connections between Penn and the community, and their overall leadership skills.

Neither we, nor the contributors to this volume, claim that the community engagement practices shared have brought about more just conditions. Instead, we hope the chapters in this book illuminate the possibilities and challenges for developing community engagement experiences that