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FOCUS: OUT IN THE WORLD: GEOGRAPHY'S COMPLEX RELATIONSHIP WITH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT



Making Space for Community-Engaged Scholarship in Geography

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Geography has a long tradition of community-engaged research and teaching. Conventional institutional and departmental norms in many U.S. universities and colleges, however, often discourage such engaged scholarship and teaching, especially among junior faculty. We argue that geographers are well poised to unravel society's twenty-first-century intractable problems if engaged scholarship is more intentionally supported. As community geographers in junior faculty positions at research-intensive universities, we discuss our experiences with placing community engagement at the core of our scholarship, highlighting opportunities for a more robust integration of engaged scholarship in academic geography. **Key Words: community-engaged scholarship, community geography, participatory geography, public geographies.**

地理学具有社区参与研究与教学的悠久传统。但在美国诸多大学与学院中,传统的机构与系所常规,却经常劝阻此般参与式的学术研究及教学,特别是对新进教师而言。我们主张,如果参与式学术研究受到更有意的支持的话,地理学者对于揭露二十一世纪社会棘手的问题将有充足的准备。作为在研究密集型大学中担任新进教师之社区地理学者,我们探讨将社区参与置于自身学术研究核心的经验,强调将参与式学术研究更强健地整合进学术地理的契机。 **关键词: 社区参与学术研究, 社区地理学, 参与式地理学, 公共地理。**

La geografía tiene una larga tradición de investigación y enseñanza con compromiso comunitario. Sin embargo, las normas institucionales y departamentales convencionales de muchas universidades e instituciones de educación superior de los EE.UU. a menudo disuaden tal tipo comprometido de erudición y enseñanza, especialmente entre el profesorado joven. Sostenemos que los geógrafos están bien preparados para resolver los intrincados problemas de la sociedad del siglo XXI, si el trabajo académico comprometido es apoyado intencionalmente. Como geógrafos comunitarios que empiezan su carrera en el profesorado de universidades con fuerte orientación hacia la investigación, discutimos nuestras experiencias para ubicar el compromiso comunitario dentro del núcleo de nuestro trabajo académico, destacando las oportunidades existentes para una integración más robusta del conocimiento comprometido en la geografía académica. **Palabras clave: conocimiento con compromiso comunitario, geografía comunitaria, geografía participativa, geografías públicas.**

Geographers have a long tradition of community-engaged research and teaching but are often constrained by the institutional reward structures that define roles of faculty teaching, research, and service. Specifically, the traditional norms of faculty tenure and promotion often make it difficult for faculty to pursue community-engaged scholarship (Holland 1999; Calleson, Jordan, and Seifer 2005; Ellison and Eatman 2008; Weerts and Sandmann 2008; Freeman, Gust, and Aloschen 2009). Although the merits and challenges of community-engaged scholarship, public, and participatory geographies have been examined elsewhere (see Kindon and Elwood's [2009] introduction to a symposium issue on participatory action research in geographic teaching, learning, and research in the *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*; Wynne-Jones, North, and Routledge's [2015]

introduction to public geographies special issue in *Area*; and Kar et al.'s [2016] introduction to the participatory geographic information system [GIS] special issue in *The Cartographic Journal*), such debates typically focus on power, ethics, representation, and the participatory research process. The mainstream geography literature has not yet included a substantive discussion of how community engagement might be formally integrated into academic geography. With this in mind, our article discusses how community-engaged scholarship can be enabled, particularly for untenured, junior faculty members.

Community-engaged scholars are often constrained by how their scholarly work is perceived, evaluated, and rewarded in home departments and institutions, especially in relation to tenure and promotion decisions. As community geographers, though, our

respective experiences suggest that it is possible to broaden institutional norms and policies to accommodate engaged scholarship. In sharing our experiences of doing engaged scholarship at two research universities (one private and one public), we acknowledge our positionalities as junior, untenured scholars who view engaged scholarship as one important approach to research, teaching, and service. With this in mind, we argue that geographers should embrace the discipline's strong history of engaged scholarship and reposition it as one potential core component of faculty scholarship and department mission, rather than merely an add-on that faculty members only engage in once they are tenured. Our respective experiences as community geographers demonstrate how community-engaged scholarship might be better incentivized, supported, evaluated, and rewarded in our academic units and institutions.

Community-engaged scholarship is a collaborative and mutually beneficial form of inquiry between academically trained scholars and nonacademics that investigates community challenges and contributes to public good (Commission on Community-Engaged Scholarship in the Health Professions 2005; Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching 2015). As community geographers, we build on important geographic traditions and approaches such as Bunge's Detroit Geographic Expedition and Institute. In producing *Fitzgerald: Geography of a Revolution*, Bunge (1973) worked closely with disenfranchised residents of Fitzgerald to produce geographic knowledge with and for the people of Fitzgerald. Initially met with skepticism and disapproval, forty years later *Fitzgerald* is heralded as a classic, its ideals taken up by geographers practicing participatory research who "promote a collaborative and nonhierarchical approach which overturns the usual ways in which academics work" (Pain 2004, 652).

Our advocacy for more formal integration of community-engaged scholarship within the discipline coincides with recent appeals from the American Association of Geographers (AAG) leadership for more "public geographies." For example, past AAG President Eric Sheppard challenged the discipline to embrace public geographies:

The time seems propitious for public geographies: In the United States, community–university partnerships and public engagement are all the rage. Nevertheless, there remain few incentives for students and faculty to pursue public geographies. Academic success is tied to research with impact, measured in citations and policy influence, with teaching also shaped by institutional priorities. Elite universities' rhetoric talks the talk of public scholarship without walking the walk: It remains too often a pro bono activity, to be undertaken in addition to everything else. (Sheppard 2013)

Sheppard's critique calls for transformation within geography, yet there remains a disconnect: "Faculty roles need to be redefined, as does the reward

structure, to acknowledge, validate, and encourage a shift in teaching, scholarship, and service toward community engagement" (Campus Compact 2002). We argue that for this shift to occur, departments and faculty must create spaces for community engagement.

Our goals for this article are to (1) summarize consistent barriers to community-engaged scholarship in academia; (2) offer our own experiences navigating traditional academic norms and policies as untenured, junior faculty members who intentionally put community engagement at the core of our scholarship; and (3) provide practical advice for geography faculty and departments that wish to embrace community-engaged scholarship.

Barriers to Community-Engaged Scholarship

The most frequently reported obstacle to engaged scholarship is the traditional academic reward system, "which puts the highest value on individual, in-depth, theory-based research that expands knowledge within a specific field. In that system, the more interdisciplinary, collaborative, and real-world applied character of engaged-community research, where a specific problem is the primary focus, is devalued or overlooked when it comes to determining promotion and tenure" (Center for Urban and Environmental Solutions, 2007). There is a pervasive disincentive for community-based research, especially among untenured faculty. Other common barriers include a bias of disciplinary peer-reviewed journals against publishing engaged scholarship, a lack of institutional leadership and resources, a lack of centralized support and faculty development services, time constraints for cultivating relationships and partnerships with community collaborators, and inadequate funding (Center for Urban and Environmental Solutions 2007).

Creating Space for Community-Engaged Scholarship

Drawing on our own experiences, we offer four strategies to dismantle these barriers, including (1) codifying expectations and evaluations for community-engaged scholarship, (2) respecting coproduction of knowledge and community "peer" evaluation of community impact in the tenure and promotion process, (3) supporting community-engaged teaching, and (4) providing resources and financial support for community-engaged scholarship.

We first discuss Jonnell A. Robinson's experiences at Syracuse University (SU) where she and the university negotiated institutional and departmental supports for community-engaged scholarship when converting her community geographer staff position into a tenure-track faculty position. Created in 2005, Syracuse Community Geography (SCG) is a university–community collaboration that uses a participatory

approach, geography, and GIS to investigate community-defined challenges. We then turn to a discussion of Timothy L. Hawthorne's experiences at Georgia State University (GSU) developing the Atlanta Community Mapping and Research Partnership, where he worked under more conventional tenure and promotion guidelines.

Codifying Expectations and Evaluation

For engaged scholarship to be sustainable, it requires a shift in institutional cultures with regard to faculty roles, evaluation, and rewards (Holland 1997). One way in which SU Geography has done this is to continuously spell out—in writing—the expectations and performance evaluation of Robinson to explain how the position differs from traditional tenure-track positions in the department. Beginning with the job advertisement, the department communicated that the position was “unconventional” and would be evaluated for promotion and tenure through an alternate lens. The job was also billed as a twelve-month position,¹ so that community projects would not be disrupted by the academic calendar, a common barrier to successful community-based participatory research.

Expectations for Robinson were further defined in a memorandum of understanding (MOU) signed by parties representing the various levels of the university. Differential expectations described in the MOU included a reduction in traditional classroom-based teaching and campus and departmental service to make space for community-oriented research and service. Individualized MOUs are rare in academia but provide an avenue for spelling out scholarly agendas for new hires that might differ from the norm.

SU Geography's tenure and promotion procedures were also revised to better align departmental policy with the MOU. Faculty voted to change the department's promotion and tenure guidelines, adding language to acknowledge MOUs. The language regarding what constitutes “research scholarship” was also broadened to include “non-refereed work such as reports to agencies,” although this type of research product continues to be valued “to a lesser extent” than books, book chapters, and peer-reviewed journal articles.

Changes to departmental guidelines came on the heels of changes to the university's tenure and promotion guidelines that were made under the leadership of former Chancellor Nancy Cantor. During Cantor's tenure, engaged scholarship was central to the university's mission. This centrality is noted as being a critical element for dismantling structural barriers within the academy that constrain community engagement (Holland 1999; Fuller and Kitchin 2004). In 2014, however, administrative turnover and a deprioritization of community engagement raised concerns over whether and how Robinson's MOU will be considered during tenure and promotion review. In response to shifts in the institutional culture and changing attitudes toward

engaged scholarship at SU, Robinson's faculty mentors take advantage of opportunities to reaffirm the differential expectations of the position, such as through teaching evaluations and annual reviews.

In 2011, the GSU Geography Department advertised a new human geography tenure-track position with several potential topical areas, including community geography. The position offered a conventional contract with no differential recognition of engaged scholarship but came with three years of course releases, making it a yearly 2:1 teaching load. This course reduction enabled Hawthorne to develop a community-engaged scholarly agenda that eventually led to several funded projects. Yet the position was evaluated under a more conventional set of Research 1 institution guidelines (a point Hawthorne knew and understood when signing the contract), prioritizing peer-reviewed publications and grant funding from external funding agencies. Our experiences, although markedly different, demonstrate that individual contracts, departmental tenure guidelines, and institutional policies are opportunities to create formal, codified guidelines for engaged scholarship.

Respecting Coproduction of Knowledge and Community “Peer” Evaluation

More intentional recognition of community-engaged scholarship implies an epistemological shift in how knowledge is produced and disseminated. Such scholarship prioritizes a participatory research process where members of communities (broadly defined) and universities work to coproduce knowledge. Research products and their dissemination often look different than traditional scholarly outputs. Community-engaged research products often take the form of reports, white papers, maps, and presentations and do not always result in peer-reviewed articles, mainly because intended audiences (on-the-ground practitioners) cannot or do not access academic literature. Such alternative products and outlets (and their impact) are not typically considered toward tenure and promotion, however.

Robinson's MOU recognizes that the products of engaged scholarship and modes of disseminating research products differ. Hence, the evaluation criteria for Robinson's engaged scholarship also reflect those differences. The local relevance and real-world impact of Robinson's research are considered. Formal feedback from community partners, as well as other engaged scholars, is sought when evaluating Robinson's engaged scholarship. The department regularly asks community partners to cite community benefits, including policy change, improvements to service delivery and capacity, or increased funding. In this way, community partners are recognized as peers in the peer-review process (Freeman, Gust, and Aloschen 2009).

The Atlanta Community Mapping and Research Project collaborated on several community geography projects with the common goal of creating shared deliverables. One project developed a mobile GIS food shelf survey that examined food stores. A second project mapped trash, flooding, and stormwater infrastructure issues. Both projects, led along with graduate students, placed explicit emphasis on coproduction of knowledge, collaborative field data collection, community trainings, and shared presentations of results. The food shelf survey created a mobile mapping application and the watershed project hosts an online map. Yet within the scope of Hawthorne's work, there were no codified guidelines exploring how such community products could be measured or evaluated, not only in the tenure and promotion process but in the impacts for local communities. Community input to measure outcomes, like in the case of Robinson, brings more voices into evaluation of community-engaged scholarship and might be useful in showing the impact that academics have in society.

Supporting Community-Engaged Teaching

Engaged or critical pedagogy seeks to enrich student learning by providing opportunities for students to actively participate in community-based participatory research—students are producers, not consumers, of knowledge. A learning model that repositions students as coproducers of knowledge requires flexible and innovative approaches to teaching and learning (Dewey and Isaac 1998). Experiential learning has value but requires resources, support, and an evaluation framework that provides faculty with the flexibility to develop effective learning opportunities (Barge and Shockley-Zalabak 2008).

Robinson involves students as coinvestigators in community-based research projects through experiential learning courses and internships. To accommodate this approach, Robinson has a differential teaching load than other departmental faculty (the typical teaching load in SU Geography is two courses per semester). Instead of teaching two formal courses each semester, Robinson teaches one course and oversees approximately 1,000 hours of credit-bearing internship hours each semester. This flexibility allows for richer and more sustainable relationships between students and community partners. Recognizing the differential learning objectives of experiential and critical pedagogies, Robinson's teaching is evaluated not only on whether students' learning objectives are met but also on whether the research priorities of the community partners are satisfactorily met.

At GSU, community geography teaching was encouraged, yet, unlike for Robinson, peer feedback and community engagement strategies in teaching were not fully considered in evaluation metrics. Hawthorne's department was supportive of new community geography courses that took students outside of

the formal classroom, but no reduction in teaching load was offered to accommodate the time-consuming nature of experiential learning. Such courses were more time intensive to design than conventional department courses as they included community workshops on using GIS technologies for community data collection, including in studies of food access, urban greenspace, illegal tire dumping, and community beautification.

Although community-engaged research and teaching were enabled at GSU, there was often discussion among the department chair, associate dean, and Hawthorne about how community-engaged teaching was distinct from research and in how to categorize Hawthorne's external funding for community geography. Hawthorne contended that students pursue original research through their community geography courses in a way that enables both faculty research and teaching. Formal guidelines at GSU were written to "count" student involvement in community-engaged research as teaching.

Providing Resources and Support for Faculty Development

Formalized support in the form of mentorship, professional development, and seed funding is critical in advancing engaged scholarship (Hollander, Saltmarsh, and Zlotkowski 2002; Barge and Shockley-Zalabak 2008; Freeman, Gust, and Aloschen 2009). Like traditional forms of scholarship, community-engaged scholarship requires guidance from peers and departmental leadership; exposure to best practices; and financial support for technology, lab space, and people power. Community-engaged scholars are in an increasingly strong position to compete for external funds as key agencies, like the National Science Foundation (NSF), focus on broader impacts to society. Broader impacts, one of NSF's most important merit review criteria, specifically emphasize contribution to society. Several areas are identified in NSF review criteria for broader impacts, and some of these include community engagement. To be competitive for such awards, however, a track record of institutional support is helpful.

From its inception (and before it was a tenure-track faculty position), Robinson's position was collaboratively funded by both the university and the broader community through commitments from local charitable foundations. Local community buy-in helped ensure that the community geographer position was not usurped by the university and pressured to conform to a traditional academic model. After the economic recession of 2008, several local foundations that had pledged financial support for community geography saw their endowments shrink, creating a funding gap for community geography. The funding gap was filled when the university took on full financial support of the position through innovative cost sharing

among the university, the college, and the department. This collaborative funding arrangement has lessened pressure to secure external funding to sustain the program, which allows more time to pursue a community-based research agenda. Institutional financial commitments have also motivated external funding. For example, the Kauffman Foundation provided \$24,000 to support experiential learning for undergraduates involved in the SCG internship program in large part because the university had also made financial investments in SCG. Financial support from the university and department has also made it possible to assist community partners in securing funding for their community initiatives. Empirical data collected via an online survey of community partnerships from 2005 to 2010 indicated that SCG collaborative work helped community partners to bring approximately \$3.1 million to local programming and the local economy. Although funds raised in collaboration with community partners to support community initiatives do not directly benefit the university and therefore would not typically “count” toward tenure and promotion, because community peers will weigh in during the tenure evaluation process, there is a mechanism to account for funding brought into the community through Robinson’s community-engaged scholarship.

Similar to SU, a significant enabling factor for community geography at GSU was the university’s financial support of the Atlanta Community Mapping and Research Project. Institutional support, however, came after an NSF Research Experiences for Undergraduates (REU) grant for \$350,000 was secured by Hawthorne and coprincipal investigator Dr. Katherine Hankins of GSU. The NSF grant provided the first federally funded community geography REU site in the United States. NSF funding was a precursor to establishing the Atlanta Community Mapping and Research Project and provided an important demonstration of the fundability of community geography.

The NSF grant catalyzed other funding as well. Hawthorne, as coprincipal investigator of a larger multidisciplinary grant, also received funding as part of a large collaborative internal grant of \$82,000 from the GSU Cities Initiative, which enabled several community geography projects. After receiving these grants, Hawthorne’s department agreed to refurbish an unoccupied science lab to create a new “community mapping center” area.

Financial support for community geography at GSU was provided in some part based on university administrators recognizing its external funding potential. Questions of whether such external funding should “count” as research or teaching were never raised formally in written annual departmental reviews, however. In his third-year review, Hawthorne articulated the integrated focus of community geography and argued that the grants he had secured to support community geography cut across all three areas of conventional scholarship. Yet a formal review of Hawthorne’s grants and publications by university

administrators noted that grants and publications appeared to be double-counted in the evaluation. Hawthorne’s experience is representative of a key problem for engaged scholars where such work often blurs research, teaching, and service in a way that is difficult to quantify in conventional evaluation metrics.

As our experiences show, developing a sustainable community-engaged scholarly agenda requires incentives (e.g., alternative teaching requirements), supports (including departmental policy), and evaluation (community members as peer reviewers). Providing seed grants can position faculty members and universities interested in community engagement to successfully compete for external funding for community-engaged scholarship. Other forms of support include faculty mentoring, assistance in developing research and teaching portfolios that articulate how engaged scholarship supports departmental and institutional missions and training in new models of engaged research and teaching. Although some of these resources were available at our institutions, we contend that more formal support structures could be implemented to enable engaged scholarship.

Conclusion: Toward a More Community-Engaged Geography

In closing, we offer suggestions for community-engaged scholars and departments interested in more formally integrating community-engaged scholarship into their scholarly agendas and departmental missions. During contract negotiations, the community-engaged scholar might consider advocating for written codification of engaged scholarship in an MOU. He or she should also inquire about how departmental tenure and promotion guidelines evaluate and reward engaged scholarship. Once hired, faculty members should initiate and sustain a dialogue with department chairs, senior faculty, and administrators about how community engagement will be supported and evaluated. It is also important for faculty members to seek out mentorship, a supportive community of peers, and professional development opportunities around community-engaged scholarship. There are resources available that can help junior faculty, in particular, to articulate the intellectual merit and impacts of community engagement and how community-engaged scholarship relates to institutional and departmental missions (see, e.g., the Community-Engaged Scholarship Toolkit developed by the Community-Campus Partnerships for Health). Finally, experiential, service, and community-engaged courses should document and evaluate community impact as well as student learning outcomes.

Of equal importance, academic departments can take measures to embrace community-engaged scholarship (Ellison and Eatman 2008). Departments determine faculty workloads and reward systems and have

considerable influence over whether and how faculty members pursue engaged scholarship. Academic departments might consider evaluating departmental consensus on community engagement. A useful rubric was published in 2013 by Kecskes to help faculty members assess community engagement elements within their academic units (Kecskes 2013). Departmental faculty can also review departmental mission statements and tenure and promotion policies to assess how (if at all) community-engaged scholarship is recognized in departmental policy (Hollander, Saltmarsh, and Zlotkowski 2001). Academic units can offer resources such as start-up financial support, mentorship, and professional development to engaged scholars. Additionally, departments can expand promotion and tenure standards to value the coproduction of knowledge and the differential products and dissemination strategies of engaged scholars. Toward this end, departments can invite community partners and faculty who are familiar with engaged scholarship to participate in promotion and merit assessment of community-engaged faculty and involve community partners who can speak to the real-world impact of faculty engagement in tenure and promotion reviews.

Geographers who pursue community-engaged scholarship are well positioned to contribute to important societal debates and discoveries while working with communities. By understanding and formally recognizing the fluid ways in which engaged scholarship cuts across the conventional pillars of academic research, teaching, and service, our discipline might be in an even stronger position to contribute to solving some of society's intractable challenges. This can only happen when our discipline and departments find ways to institutionalize engaged scholarship. Otherwise, we risk engaged scholarship remaining a fringe activity for those who are fortunate enough to have the support and recognition of their peers. ■

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Note

¹The position ultimately became an eleven-month appointment after negotiations with the college.

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