

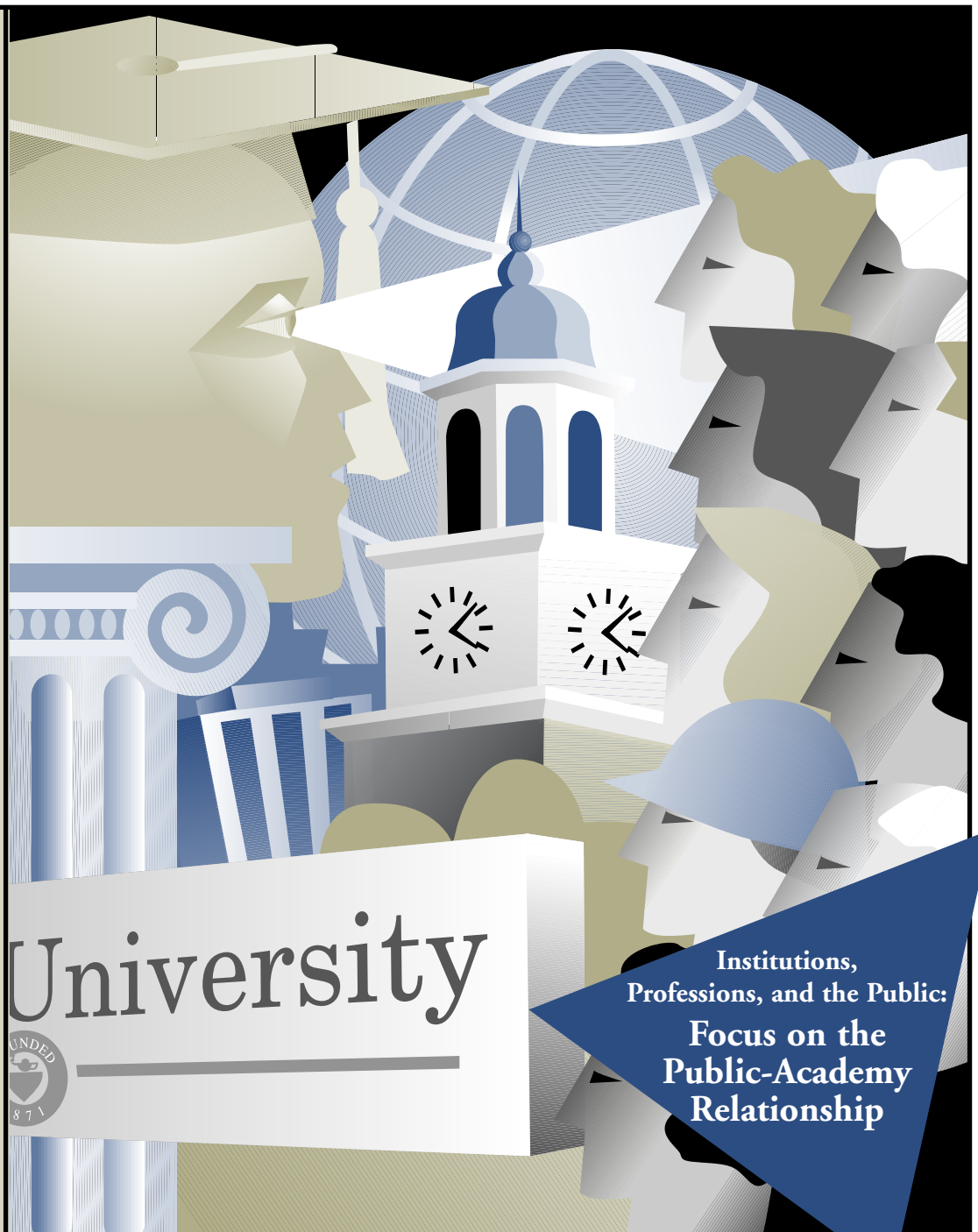
# CONNECTIONS

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# The Public Practice of Scholarship and the Production of Knowledge

By *Deborah Witte*

For more than a decade, the Kettering Foundation has been at the forefront of research on the role of higher education in the practice of public scholarship, the creation of public knowledge, and the public role of scholars.

Traditionally, the production of knowledge (and its corollary, truth) has been the bailiwick solely of scholars in the academy. Kettering has long wrestled with questions of “knowledge for whom” and “knowledge for what” in light of the foundation’s focus on self-rule. Most would acknowledge that the production of knowledge for self-rule requires that citizens be at the forefront. While scholars are indispensable for technical or empirical knowledge, only citizens can create the knowledge required for self-rule. But this does not preclude scholars from playing an important role. They do not, after all, forfeit their citizenship on entry into academia.

There are numerous examples of scholars who have embraced a public practice of their craft and who seek a different relationship with the public. Among them is Alejandro Sanz de Santamaria. In his essay “Political Life,” Sanz suggests that the scholar is usually alienated from the very community that knowledge is designed to help. There is a need, then, for a scholar, a public scholar, who can stand on equal footing *with* the public. Not on top, as Harry Boyte of the University of Minnesota likes to say, but on tap, as a resource.

The public, in the work of forming itself, grapples with questions that no expert can provide, questions about how we are to live and prosper together. These questions do not lend themselves to expert-provided answers. And so a public scholar brings necessary, but not sufficient, knowledge to public decision making. The production of knowledge for self-rule is the work of the public. The job of a public scholar, as sociologist C. Wright Mills defined it, is “to help build and strengthen self-cultivating publics.”

There are many barriers for a scholar seeking to become a public scholar, not the least of which are the tenure-granting process and superspecialization. Nonetheless, as Peter Levine of the University of Maryland reminds us, “to avoid participation because one holds an advanced degree is to dodge one’s civic responsibility. There is even an insidious kind of arrogance implicit in claiming that one is not an ‘ordinary citizen.’ Intellectuals are entitled to participate, not as professionals, but as citizens with personal opinions and interests, just like everyone else.”

Public scholarship, according to research conducted by Scott Peters and his colleagues at Cornell University, is not limited to problem solving or decision making. It can also include problem setting whereby citizens name, frame, and come to deliberate on civic and



*Deborah Witte*



## THE PUBLIC PRACTICE OF SCHOLARSHIP

be done about them in pursuit of public values and interests.”

What, if anything significant, America’s colleges and universities can do to revitalize this nation’s civic life presents a complex challenge to a foundation whose mission is to help make democracy work as it should. Kettering trustees and staff are currently examining the foundation’s

agenda in this area with a view toward setting its research priorities for the coming year.

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## Apple IPM in Massachusetts: Public Scholarship in Action

By Daniel R. Cooley

*This brief account of public scholarship in action describes one of eight field studies conducted by a team of scholars from five land-grant universities. The research was supported by the Kettering Foundation, the Kellogg Foundation, and the Cornell University Agricultural Experiment Station’s federal formula funds.*

On the surface of it, this is an account of a research and teaching program intended to reduce or even eliminate the use of pesticides in New England apple production, using a general approach called integrated pest management, or IPM. IPM is an amalgam of biology and ecology, as well as economics and politics, and a different history of the program might emphasize its technical evolution. This story, however, suggests that scholarship in the arena of a public issue, in this case agricultural pesticides, must be public scholarship if it is to truly succeed.

Several characteristics make apple IPM public scholarship. For one, the teaching and research reach well beyond

the campus. The labs extend beyond brick and ivy to the orchards of New England, the libraries go beyond journals and papers to include the experience of people who seldom set foot on university grounds, and the lecture halls include cold barns and hotel conference rooms.

Perhaps because public scholarship, like IPM, engages nonacademics, it is viewed as less scholarly. In reality, public scholars must produce typically scholarly publications, teach advanced courses, and then, unlike many of their colleagues, engage people outside academia in the scholarly process. For example, ecologists and entomologists around the world know Dr. Ron Prokopy as an innovative researcher in insect behavior ecology and evolution, while most New England apple growers know him as Ron, the apple bug guy.

While his students and technicians perform experiments on the insect colonies in the basement lab of Fernald Hall, Prokopy himself might be knee-deep in dew-covered grass chatting with a grower about the family or the price of apples. Faculty who engage in public scholar-



*The Kettering Foundation, chartered in 1927, is an operating foundation — not a grant-giving foundation — rooted in the American tradition of inventive research. Its founder, Charles F. Kettering, holder of more than 200 patents, is best known for his invention of the automobile self-starter. He was interested, above all, in seeking practical answers to “the problems behind the problems.” The foundation today continues in that tradition. The objective of the research now — the study of what helps democracy work as it should. Six major Kettering programs are designed to shed light on what is required for strengthening public life. Kettering is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) research corporation supported by a \$250 million endowment.*

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