The Higher Education Exchange is founded on a thought articulated by Thomas Jefferson in 1820:

I know no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion by education.

In the tradition of Jefferson, the Higher Education Exchange agrees that a central goal of higher education is to help make democracy possible by preparing citizens for public life. The Higher Education Exchange is part of a movement to strengthen higher education’s democratic mission and foster a more democratic culture throughout American society. Working in this tradition, the Higher Education Exchange publishes case studies, analyses, news, and ideas about efforts within higher education to develop more democratic societies.
## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deborah Witte</td>
<td>Foreword</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claire Snyder-Hall</td>
<td>Faculty Happiness and Civic Agency</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David W. Brown</td>
<td>Blind Spots in Academe</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theodore R. Alter</td>
<td>Faculty, Citizens, and Expertise in Democracy</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeffrey C. Bridger</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paloma Z. Frumento</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam Weinberg</td>
<td>A Vision for the Liberal Arts:</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lorlene Hoyt</td>
<td>University Civic Engagement:</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard M. Battistoni</td>
<td>Beyond Service and Service Learning:</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romand Coles and Blase Scarnati</td>
<td>Beyond Enclosure: Pedagogy for a Democratic Commonwealth</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marietjie Oelofsen</td>
<td>We Are the Ones We Have Been Waiting For: The Promise Of Civic Renewal In America By Peter Levine</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Mathews</td>
<td>Who Are the Citizens We Serve? A View from the Wetlands of Democracy</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
UNIVERSITY CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

By Lorlene Hoyt

University civic engagement is a strategy for addressing pervasive challenges to civic life, such as poverty, illiteracy, disease, and natural disaster. It is a collaborative form of learning-by-doing that reflects, and is shaped by, its environment—the history, climate, culture, politics, and economy of where the work happens. The most common approaches include service learning, volunteerism, extension, applied research, participatory action research, and engaged scholarship.

A credit-bearing, curricular activity designed for students to provide services to local communities for the purpose of developing civic-minded graduates (Bringle and Hatcher 1995), service learning is an approach to university civic engagement that is practiced in all regions and many countries of the world. It sprung up in North America in the 1980s and Latin America in the mid-1990s, and it migrated to Sub-Saharan Africa in the early 2000s. Service learning exists, but is not as widespread, in Asian Pacific states, Europe, and the Arab region. It thrives in public and private universities and colleges, large and small. It flourishes in both urban and rural settings and has permeated all fields of study. For these reasons, service learning represents the middle pillar of higher education’s three universal core missions—research, teaching, and service—and provides a sturdy framework for understanding university civic engagement.

History and Evolution of University Civic Engagement

University civic engagement is a growing global movement. From North America to Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia Pacific, Europe, and the Arab Region, universities and colleges have integrated engagement activities into one or more of their three core missions. (For the purposes of this paper, each region is defined by and includes the member states according to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization or UNESCO.) While there is significant variation across and within different regions of the globe, the larger story is one of common vision
(Hoyt and Hollister 2014). Characterized by both a diversity of approach and universality of strategic direction, university civic engagement is evolving differently in each region of the world. The varied ways in which universities approach learning by doing with their local communities, as well as the societal values that influence such collaborations, are shown below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Research</th>
<th>Teaching (Co-curricular)</th>
<th>Service (Extracurricular)</th>
<th>Societal Values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North America</td>
<td>Community-Based Research, Action Research, Engaged Research</td>
<td>Experiential Learning, Service Learning</td>
<td>Extension, Volunteerism, Community Service</td>
<td>Democratization of Knowledge, Good Citizenship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America</td>
<td>Community-Based Research, Participatory Action Research, Socially Committed Research</td>
<td>Solidarity Service Learning</td>
<td>Extension, Field Work</td>
<td>Social Responsibility, Social Commitment, Solidarity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Saharan Africa</td>
<td>Participatory Research, Applied Research</td>
<td>Adult And Life-long Learning, Service Learning, Community-Based Field Training</td>
<td>Community Service, Field Attachment, Community Outreach</td>
<td>Social Responsibility, Good citizenship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia Pacific</td>
<td>Community-Based Participatory Research</td>
<td>Adult Education, Service Learning, Science Shops</td>
<td>Extension, Volunteerism</td>
<td>Social Responsibility, Brotherhood of Man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Participatory Research</td>
<td>Service Learning, Science Shops</td>
<td>Extension</td>
<td>Societal Engagement, Social Cohesion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab Region</td>
<td>Applied Research</td>
<td>Field Observations, Community Service Projects</td>
<td>Volunteerism, Charitable Services, Philanthropy</td>
<td>Social Solidarity, Charity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**North America**

North American scholars argue that approaches to university civic engagement are grounded in the philosophical work of John Dewey, who believed in “learning by doing” and citizen engagement (Axelroth, Hodges, and Dubb 2012). Understood as a public good, institutions of higher education in North America have long worked in partnership with nearby communities. In 1862, the U.S. Congress
passed the Morrill Act, establishing a system of public universities in each state. These land-grant institutions received cooperative experiment station and extension funding to solve problems with farmers and conduct public research. Jane Addams’ Hull House at the University of Illinois at Chicago is another vivid early example and the standard-bearer for the settlement-house movement that expanded from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century. By the 1960s, activist academics began weaving their own community work into their teaching activities; in 1967, the term “service learning” was coined to describe faculty and student involvement on the Tennessee Valley Authority project (Axelroth, Hodges, and Dubb 2012). A 2007 survey by Campus Compact, a coalition of university and college presidents committed to civic purposes in higher education, shows that 12 percent of U.S. faculty were or had been involved in teaching a service-learning course (Bringle, Hatcher, and Jones 2011). At “engaged” institutions, such as Michigan State University, service learning has grown dramatically from 4,000 students in 2002 to 19,000 students in 2012 (Fitzgerald 2014).

Beyond service and teaching, there are numerous university civic engagement efforts embedded in research missions. Community-based research and action research entered the scene in the middle of the twentieth century. Such approaches challenge traditional social science by emphasizing the relationship between knowledge and action. Sometimes institutionalized in the form of university and college centers, an epistemology of technical rationality dominates many university and college cultures, and some faculty consider these methodologies inferior (Hoyt 2010; Hoyt 2013). (Examples include the Action Research Center at the University of Cincinnati, the Research Center for Leadership in Action at New York University, and the Center for Community Action as well as the Haas Center for Public Service at Stanford, which encourages and supports community-based research.)
Latin America

Many institutions of higher education throughout Latin America have a long and strong tradition of engagement with the community. In 1905, the Universidad Nacional de La Plata created the region’s first extension project, signaling the start of the university reform movement and its emphasis on service, or the third mission (Tapia 2014). The movement also gave rise to the notion of obligatory social service, which was first adopted in Mexico’s Constitution of 1917. By 1945, the mandate required 300 hours of student social service as a requirement for graduation. Other Latin American countries, such as Costa Rica, El Salvador, Venezuela, Colombia, and Panama, followed suit (De Gortari 2005). The movement was reinvigorated in the 1960s by Paulo Freire, who questioned the “banking” concept and the broader societal values of social commitment and solidarity that are central to many university and college missions today. (Paulo Reglus Neves Freire was a Brazilian educator and philosopher who is best known for his book Pedagogy of the Oppressed, which frames education as a political act. Freire challenged the “banking” concept of education in which the student was perceived by the teacher as an empty account in need of deposits or filling.)

Solidarity service learning is a leading approach, practiced by public and private universities and colleges as well as K-12 schools in Argentina, Costa Rica, Chile, Venezuela, Uruguay, Paraguay, and Bolivia (Tapia and Mallea 2003). For example, Pontificial Catholic University Chile has operated PuentesUC (BridgesUC), a partnership with 14 municipalities in the Santiago metropolitan area, for more than a decade. Faculty and students work hand-in-hand with municipal leaders to address issues of health, environment, and community development (Hoyt and Hollister 2014). In the engineering faculty of the Universidad de Salta (Argentina), students design, build, and install solar energy devices in isolated communities in the mountains of the province as part of the renewable energy course. The third mission, too, is well represented, with university faculty and staff throughout Latin America actively connecting their research to social challenges.

“Faculty and students work hand-in-hand with municipal leaders to address issues of health, environment, and community development.”
and participatory action research appeared in the 1960s and 1970s, with variations such as engaged research and socially committed research promulgating in more recent decades (Tapia 2014; Garrocho 2011; Naidorf et al. 2007; Orozco 2010).

**Sub-Saharan Africa**

The British Advisory Committee on Education in the colonies prompted the establishment of several universities in Sub-Saharan Africa, including Fort Hare in South Africa (1916) and Makerere in Uganda (1922). The extracurricular British tradition of community outreach was adopted in the mid-1940s, a decade or less before several African countries gained independence. In the 1960s and 1970s, leaders, such as the former president of the Republic of Tanzania, Julius Nyerere, advocated educational reform aimed at contributing to societal transformation (Hatcher and Erasmus 2008). These reforms—coupled with the UNESCO conference at Tananarive on higher education, as well as social and economic transformation resulting from the founding of the Association of African Universities—arguably created the foundation for Sub-Saharan Africa’s contemporary approaches to university civic engagement (Walters and Openjuru 2014; Preece et al. 2012). In the late-1970s and early-1980s, adult education theorists introduced participatory research at a regional workshop held in Mzumbe, Tanzania. Universities (such as University of the Western Cape) defined their missions in relation to the anti-apartheid struggle. In the 1990s, after the end of apartheid, South African universities integrated engagement into their missions, and a wide array of community service and service learning opportunities were underway in other parts of Sub-Saharan Africa. At Ashesi University College in Ghana, students began implementing the institution’s mission of “concern for others” by participating with their professors in a series of substantial, long-term projects with people in the local community. At Makerere University, “field attachment” (or service learning) became mandatory. Community service became a criterion for staff promotion at the University of Botswana (Preece 2011).
Today, university civic engagement continues to evolve into novel approaches in South Africa, where best practices are shared through the South African Higher Education Community Engagement Forum (Watson et al.).

**Asia Pacific**

Residential universities existed in the Asia Pacific region as far back as the fourth century BC in the eastern region of India, where thousands of Nalanda students studied several different specializations (Tandon 2008). Many countries in this region had their own academic institutions (such as Confucius academies in China and Madrasahs in India), but colonial powers began altering them in the 19th century (Ma and Tandon 2014). Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, Chinese, Indian, and Korean governments promoted the idea of “social practice,” “societal engagement,” and “social responsibility” among their students, respectively. Extension and adult education appeared first, followed by volunteerism and community-based participatory research, which took hold and spread throughout the region in the 1970s and 1980s. Service learning emerged in the early 1990s, trailed by the idea of engagement (Ma and Tandon 2014). While the curricular integration of university civic engagement is popular in many Asian-Pacific countries, others have a “marked preference for volunteer services as opposed to service learning” (Watson et al. 2011, 209). For example, at the Notre Dame of Marbel University located in Koronadal City (Philippines) some faculty actively “oppose service learning because they believe in the higher value of voluntary action” (Watson et al. 2011; 132, 209). Service learning has been institutionalized in Japan, Taiwan, Thailand, and India, as evidenced by the establishment of university and college centers. (Some examples include the Service-Learning Center at International Christian University, Japan; the Service-Learning Center at Fu Jen Catholic University in Taiwan; the Center for Professional Ethics and Service-Learning at Assumption University in Thailand; and the Center for Outreach and Service-Learning Program at Lady Doak College in India.)
In Australia, emphasis on university community engagement has increased significantly in the past decade. This is perhaps best exemplified by the formation of the Australian University Community Engagement Alliance (now known as Engagement Australia) in 2003 whose goal is “leading, developing and promoting an integrated approach to university-community engagement within and between the higher education, private, public and community-based sectors” (Engagement Australia 2013). During the same time period, the Australian government increased attention to the social responsibility of higher education, including the establishment of university audits that examine community engagement. In Malaysia, China, and beyond, the concept of “village adoption” is growing in popularity. For example, the International Medical University in Malaysia initiated the Kampung Angkat (village adoption) Project in 2007. Each of its three campuses engage with nearby rural villages, allowing students to practice their clinical skills and villagers to receive treatment and medicine.

Europe

Since their medieval origins, universities have had both private and public purposes. In 1898, the University of Oviedo in Asturias, Spain, implemented the practice of extension to address atrocious urban living conditions. For several decades, these efforts spread and developed in other universities, including the Universities of Salamanca, Zaragoza, and Santander (Benneworth and Osborne 2014). Contemporary university civic engagement in Europe started in the 1960s as Western European universities embraced grass-roots activism and community work, taking such approaches as continuing education. Today, service learning exists in Europe, but is less prominent than in the United States. Luephana University in Germany and the National University of Ireland in Galway have embedded volunteerism and service into their curricula (Reinmuth, Sass, and Lauble 2007). Science shops are the dominant approach to university civic engagement throughout Europe, and include service learning as well as elements of research and knowledge exchange (Benneworth and Osborne...
Established in the Netherlands in the 1970s, science shops aim to strengthen public involvement in research by involving civil society groups in the production of specialist knowledge. This approach is well aligned with broader European values of societal engagement and social cohesion, and reinforces the United Kingdom’s new national policy framework, which focuses on “creating more socially responsible citizens” (Birdwell et al. 2013). With respect to the research mission, Spain is a leader, as it is home to the Instituto Paulo Freire, a national community-university research network that supports a number of Spanish Universities (Hall 2011). Beyond science shops, participatory and community-based research activities are not common in Europe.

**Arab Region**

In the 22 countries included in the Arab Region, extracurricular civic engagement programs are more common than approaches that are embedded in teaching and research activities. The Arab cultural values of social solidarity and charity have been adopted, and the public regards universities and colleges as the lead institutions in building a robust citizenry (Ibrahim 2014). Though governments in this region do not encourage the development of civil society, institutions of higher education provide charitable services (such as food, clothing, and medical supplies), deploy volunteers, and create forums for public debate. Though short-term student service projects led by university faculty and staff dominate the region’s approach to university civic engagement, a small number of universities have institutionalized a commitment to serving the community in the form of centers. (In 2003, Taiz University in Yemen created a Center for Environmental Studies and Community Services. Qatar University in Doha launched a Center of Volunteerism and Civic Responsibility in September of 2012.) In Morocco, Al Akhawayn University’s Azrou Center for Community Development provides instruction to community...
leaders in tandem with the university’s 60-hour community service requirement for students. The Azrou Center is the exception, not the rule, as the issue of compulsory service is being debated in a handful of countries. While rare, some universities and colleges offer service-learning courses and others have core missions that point to the aspiration of infusing civic engagement throughout the institution. (Zarqa Private University and Al al-Bayt University in Jordan, the American University in Beirut, and the University of Balamand in Tripoli, Lebanon, offer service learning courses.) An especially impressive example of this is Al-Quds University in Jerusalem, which has a 120-hour service requirement for graduation, a clinic-based legal education program in its Law School, and applied research projects to “inform public decision-making on policy issues and conflicts such as water supply and quality” (Watson 2011, 83-89).

**Conclusion**

To address such challenges of civic life as poverty, illiteracy, disease, and natural disaster, universities in some regions of the globe began collaborating with local communities more than a hundred years ago. In other regions, university civic engagement is a strategy that emerged in the middle of the twentieth century. Today, universities and communities around the globe are engaging with one another by way of service learning, volunteerism, extension, applied research, participatory action research, engaged scholarship, and other approaches. University civic engagement has grown dramatically in some regions (such as North America and Sub-Saharan Africa), as evidenced by the wide range of approaches that have been adopted over time. In other regions (such as Europe and the Arab Region), the strategy is growing steadily, yet substantial resistance to some approaches remains. Nonetheless, the university civic engagement movement is global. It is driven and shaped by societal values, such as good citizenship, social responsibility, and social solidarity. Though characterized by a diversity of approaches, the universities and communities participating in the movement share a common vision: collective action and learning to improve civic life.
REFERENCES


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