Anti-Elitism and the Civic Purposes of Higher Education

Articles
Maria Farland
Scott Peters
Katy J. Harriger and Jill J. McMillan
Derek W. M. Barker
David W. Brown
Kara Lindaman, B. Da’Vida Plummer,
and Joseph Scanlon

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David Mathews

Additional Reflections
Harry C. Boyte, Joni Doherty, Sara A. Mehltretter Drury,
Mathew Johnson, and Timothy J. Shaffer
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.

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The Carnegie Foundation, where I lead the Classification for Community Engagement, describes community engagement as the “collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity.” For Carnegie, the purpose of community engagement is the “partnership of [academic] knowledge and resources with those [nonacademic] sectors to prepare educated, engaged citizens; strengthen democratic values and civic responsibility; address critical societal issues; and contribute to the public good.”

Derek W. M. Barker’s essay “Five Emerging Practices in the Scholarship of Engagement” was originally published in 2006, the same year that Carnegie issued its first list of institutions of higher education that demonstrated extraordinary commitment to their public purposes. Barker’s five emerging practices reflect some but not all of Carnegie’s definitions, and 16 years later, we can better assess which of these practices have emerged, blossomed, and borne fruit. In particular, in this brief introduction, I would like to offer an addition to Barker’s analysis, focusing on a topic that I believe received insufficient attention in the literature at that time and which has, in the years since, become central to Carnegie’s and my own definition of community engagement: coproduction of knowledge. Partnership and reciprocity grounded in this principle are at the core of community engagement. It decenters academic knowledge and resources by positioning it on an equal footing with nonacademic sectors, problematizing the power dynamic central to the knowledge production and enterprise of the academy.

In contrast, public scholarship and participatory research, Barker writes, stress “the active role citizens can play in the production of academic knowledge.” Public information networks establish databases administered by the academy to “help communities identify resources and assets.” Civic literacy scholarship describes scholars within the academy working to “enhance democratic processes by ensuring that their disciplines are supplying publics with the knowledge necessary for reflective judgments on public issues.”

These definitions do not fully acknowledge systems of knowledge and knowledge production outside of the academy as equal and necessary contributors to the enterprise of community engagement as a form of engaged scholarship. While participatory research does center marginalized groups or communities in defining problems, it often absorbs the scholarship of marginalized or oppressed groups into the academy without truly considering the power dynamic present.
Perhaps the closest to the Carnegie Foundation’s definition of community engagement is community partnership. Barker argues that “in contrast to other forms of engaged scholarship, community partnerships are especially concerned with power, resources, and building social movements.” Yet, this doesn’t describe coproduction of knowledge. While the practice will “often overlap with public scholarship and participatory research practices, this approach tends to emphasize the end result of social transformation over the process and its political qualities.”

If participatory research succeeds in producing knowledge in a collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities, albeit within a power dynamic that favors institutions, and community partnership succeeds in building reciprocal relationships that lead to social transformation, community engagement sits on the boundary between these two. It describes a scholarly collaboration that prioritizes systems of knowledge production from outside of the academy, drawing on resources and practices from both groups equitably to coproduce knowledge and action.

Genuine community engagement by institutions of higher education must avoid preserving the established epistemology of the academy and reinforcing systems of knowledge built on colonial values and ideals at the expense of indigenous, intersectional, and alternative systems of knowledge production. While there is particular and powerful value in the forms, processes, and methods of knowledge generation that come from within the academy, knowledge creation systems and processes outside the academy are essential for democratic processes to take root and thrive.

— Mathew Johnson

More than ever, higher education professionals are starting to describe their work using the words “participatory research,” “public scholarship,” and “community partnerships.” In fact, words like these are being used in the titles and mission statements of centers, programs, and other initiatives to broaden the idea of scholarship and deepen the connection between higher education institutions and the public realm. For the past few years, I have been tracking these projects, as well as the work of independent scholars who have similar approaches. I see an exciting group of academics trying to make the case that civic work makes for good politics and good scholarship. Civic work helps scholars generate more practical research questions, enables them to collect more data, and allows them to see their ideas working in practice. Engaged scholars are finding that their practices are not something they do on the side in addition to their academic research. They embrace different methods and emphasize varying
aspects of democratic politics, but their work can be understood and assessed as a “scholarship of engagement.”

Five emerging practices are showing how higher education professionals can expand the idea of scholarship and enrich the political life of their communities. Each one is animated by a specific theory of democracy, and as a result, each one uses its own methods to address a specific set of public problems. What distinguishes these practices is the intent of the scholars, not the methods they employ. While academic scholarship is often driven by the training and expertise of the scholar, engaged scholars are driven by what they intend to accomplish. By thinking about the scholarship of engagement along these dimensions, my intention is to provide a clear and systematic framework through which to understand and assess the work that makes up this movement while also recognizing its diversity.

The scholarship of engagement concept was first stated in the work of the late Ernest Boyer, who served as president of the Carnegie Academy for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning. Boyer’s work was dedicated to expanding the idea of scholarship beyond research published in peer-reviewed journals in order to recognize and value all the things that academics actually do. One of Boyer’s later works took a further step to argue that the idea of scholarship could be broadened to include the scholarship of engagement: practices that overlap with the traditional areas of scholarship but also incorporate practices of collaboration with public entities.

So what does civic work have to do with scholarship? What is “scholarly” about the scholarship of engagement? By linking civic work to scholarship, this terminology reflects a growing awareness that civic work can further academic as well as political goals. On the research side, scholars are making contributions to their field by using methods that incorporate civic work. Rather, civic work is woven into the research process itself, a critical component of the scholar’s methodology.

Practices of civic work can also make a difference in what Boyer calls the “scholarship of teaching.” For a long time, the service learning and experiential

Civic work helps scholars generate more practical research questions, enables them to collect more data, and allows them to see their ideas working in practice.
learning movements have been showing that students can benefit from seeing the ideas discussed in the classroom applied practically in the outside world. What the scholarship of engagement adds to these pedagogies is a conscious effort at building deeper relationships with communities beyond the idea of “service,” which does not always lead to more enduring forms of engagement. The scholarship of engagement attempts to provide students with greater insight into the nature of public problems by asking them to practice more intense forms of democratic citizenship. Although these practices are often present implicitly in service and experiential learning programs, they are explicitly and consciously cultivated by the scholarship of engagement. In these ways, far from compromising their seriousness and rigor, engaged scholars are making the case that their work meets or even exceeds traditional norms for assessing scholarship.

The Scholarship of Engagement: Five Emerging Practices

So what do engaged scholars do? How does their work contribute to democracy? The scholarship of engagement is distinct from traditional approaches because it integrates practices of civic work into the production of knowledge. It is different, for example, from traditional academic scholarship that simply has to do with civic work. The scholarship of engagement is also distinct from public intellectual scholarship, which takes traditional academic literature and attempts to give it greater visibility in the media. Rather, the scholarship of engagement means finding creative ways to communicate to public audiences, work for the public good, and, most important, generate knowledge with public participation.

To accomplish these goals, engaged scholars are embracing a number of methods and the terminologies that go with them. Unfortunately, such diversity can make for a daunting task when it comes to understanding and assessing these practices. In order to make sense of these approaches, I decided to proceed inductively to find out how scholars are describing their own work and to see whether any patterns can be identified. I found five emerging practices (see table 1).

First, public scholarship is most often used to describe academic work that incorporates practices of deliberative politics to enhance scholarship. Public scholars are usually informed by some combination of the “deliberative” or “participatory” theories of democracy developed by thinkers such as John Dewey and Jürgen Habermas. In contrast to “participatory research” and “action research,” however, public scholarship generally emphasizes deliberation over participation—the quality of the discourse rather than the quantity
of participants. A common public scholarship practice is the open public forum. Forums typically address issues of wide concern, and, in particular, they address complex issues that require actual public discussion rather than simply voting or taking a public opinion poll. Dewey refers to these sorts of problems as “public problems.”

Several examples illustrate the ways in which deliberative politics can enhance scholarship. National organizations such as the Study Circles Resource Center and the National Issues Forums use deliberative methods, often in association with civic work centers on college campuses. As Keith Morton and Sandra Enos tell us, these forums are often linked to coursework in fields such as political science and public policy, providing student participants with a powerful learning experience. Similarly, regional studies scholars at the University of Kentucky Center for Participatory Research and Democratic Planning used forums to draw citizens into the research process on issues ranging from local economic development to the folk traditions of their community. One of their programs, for example, used an innovative blend of forums, films, and humanities scholarship to bring awareness to the long-term impacts of highway development on the local economy. These scholars found that the level of public knowledge on this issue increased as a result of civic work and public deliberation. A group of environmental health scientists, including

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**Table 1. The Scholarship of Engagement: Five Practices**

<table>
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<th>Theory</th>
<th>Problems Addressed</th>
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<td>Public scholarship</td>
<td>Deliberative democracy</td>
<td>Complex “public” problems requiring deliberation</td>
<td>Face-to-face, open forums</td>
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<td>Participatory research</td>
<td>Participatory democracy</td>
<td>Inclusion of specific groups</td>
<td>Face-to-face collaboration with specific publics</td>
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<td>Community partnership</td>
<td>Social democracy</td>
<td>Social change, structural transformation</td>
<td>Collaboration with intermediary groups</td>
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<tr>
<td>Public information networks</td>
<td>Democracy (broadly understood)</td>
<td>Networking, communication</td>
<td>Databases of public resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic literacy scholarship</td>
<td>Democracy (broadly understood)</td>
<td>Enhancing public discourse</td>
<td>Communication with general public</td>
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</table>
John Sullivan, recently found that by using community outreach and public forums, they could collaborate with citizens to monitor local environmental problems. As a result, the researchers gained access to new data sources, and their work was communicated more effectively to the community. Similarly, Nick Jordan and a group of sustainable development scientists recently found that their research on weed science is more effective when the farmers who use their research are involved in the process. By collaborating with actual practitioners in the process of the research, these scientists found themselves addressing more urgent research questions with greater effectiveness. In all of these instances, scholars and students are finding new ways to enrich the scholarship process, generating new research questions and gaining access to new data sources through innovative practices of deliberative democracy.

The second emerging practice, very closely related to public scholarship, is participatory research, also referred to as “action research” or “participatory action research.” Like public scholarship, participatory research stresses the active role citizens can play in the production of academic knowledge. The main difference I see between the two stems from the relative emphasis on participation versus deliberation. While public scholars are more concerned with enhancing the quality of public participation in research, for participatory research, the emphasis tends to be on promoting participation itself. Participatory research tends to respond to problems of exclusion by reaching out to a marginalized or previously excluded group. For example, Kathy Mordock and Marianne Krasny define action research as “a process of research in which an oppressed group of people or a community identifies a problem, collects information, analyzes, and acts upon the problem in order to solve it and to promote public transformation.” These practices have developed alongside “activist” criticisms of deliberative democracy like those of Iris Marion Young. These critics argue that deliberative practices tend to force marginalized groups to compromise, preventing radical solutions from emerging. Since the emphasis is on including a specific group in research to solve a
specific problem, the deliberative methods of public scholarship, such as open public forums on universal issues, are less appropriate. Despite their differences of emphasis, however, public scholarship and participatory research often overlap and can supplement each other, depending on the nature of the problem being addressed.

Like public scholarship, participatory research is showing that good politics can make for good scholarship. The weed scientists mentioned above described their work using the public scholarship terminology but also drew heavily from participatory research scholarship as well as from the concept of “public work.” Similarly, participatory research is the preferred paradigm used by the scholars at the Center for Participatory Research and Democratic Planning at the University of Kentucky, cited above, although their methods overlap significantly with public scholarship. Participatory research and public scholarship are not so much opposed as they are responding to different problems in democratic politics. Situations may call for building bridges to specific groups to bring more participants into the process, or they may call for improving the quality of discourse of existing groups. Engaged scholars are finding innovative ways to blend these approaches in response to specific problems.

Third, the scholarship of engagement includes practices referred to as community partnerships. Public participation and deliberation may be key components of community partnerships, but the primary emphasis in this field tends to be on cultural transformation. As a result, one might say that community partnerships are animated primarily by a conception of democracy. In contrast to other forms of engaged scholarship, community partnerships are especially concerned with power, resources, and building social movements. While community partnerships often overlap with public scholarship and participatory research practices, this approach tends to emphasize the end result of social transformation over the process and its political qualities.

Harry C. Boyte, of the University of Minnesota’s Center for Democracy and Citizenship, describes his community partnership practices as “public work.” Scholars there engage in a range of community projects and, through their experiences, contribute to scholarly literature in fields such as political theory, public policy, and sociology. Ira Harkavy, a leader in this field and director of the Center for Community Partnerships at the University of Pennsylvania, describes his work as a conscious effort at “going beyond service learning” by accomplishing structural transformation through comprehensive institutional commitments linked to teaching and research, a goal that is only sometimes
explicitly stated in service-learning practices. Again, other scholars use a combination of community partnership methods and practices drawn from other forms of engagement. For example, the weed scientists mentioned above also describe their public scholarship as a form of public work, showing that deliberative politics can be a crucial component of social transformation.

Fourth, many of the scholarship of engagement centers are creating public information networks. These networks typically help communities identify resources and assets by providing comprehensive databases of local activists, advocacy groups, and available services. While these programs do not always stress the iterative and deliberative quality of the forms of engaged scholarship, they use university resources to better inform public judgments and enrich the quality of discourse. Public information programs are best suited to dealing with situations in which the resources already exist in a community to solve a problem, but they are not being utilized effectively because of a lack of organization or communication. Examples of this approach include the Seattle Political Information Network of the Center for Communication and Civic Work at the University of Washington and the Democracy Collaborative’s Information Commons at the University of Maryland.

A final approach to the scholarship of engagement emphasizes civic skills and civic literacy. Regardless of one’s specific conception of democracy, any healthy democracy requires at least a minimal competence in knowledge of political institutions, economics, and science and technology to make educated and informed decisions. Scholarship conceived as an expert practice reserved for a few specialists further undermines the public’s capacity for effective participation. Engaged scholars in this field are helping to enhance democratic processes by ensuring that their disciplines are supplying publics with the knowledge necessary for reflective judgments on public issues. This approach again aims to deepen the practices of engagement by reducing the separation between expert specialists and the lay public, as well as by its specific emphasis on skills that are relevant to political participation and democratic decision-making. At the same time, civic-literacy approaches differ from other forms of engaged scholarship by targeting relatively broad and long-term trends in general public knowledge rather than specific and immediate problems. Project Pericles at Macalester College is one exemplary service-learning program with a specific focus on civic learning. Natural scientists, like Stuart Lee and Wolff-Michael Roth, have also been increasingly concerned with ensuring that the public has an adequate understanding of science and technology so as to reach reflective judgments on those issues.
One sign that these practices are catching on as both good politics and good scholarship is the development of specific criteria for the assessment of engaged scholarship. Lorilee Sandmann and the National Review Board for the Scholarship of Engagement, for example, have been working in this field, serving as peer evaluators in promotion and tenure decisions. They try to identify practices of engagement with real scholarly value, not just “service” that is done on the side. Assessment work may impose challenging standards for the scholarship of engagement movement, but it helps make the case to promotion and tenure committees that practices of engagement are central to the research and teaching goals of the profession. Although assessment is not itself engagement (and I do not include it among the five practices), this work is a critical component of the engaged scholarship universe.

Conclusion

The reality of the scholarship of engagement universe is, of course, fluid and complex, and cannot be easily reduced into boxes. The terms I have identified do not have settled definitions. They are closely related and easily confused with one another, and at times, they are even used interchangeably. Moreover, these practices are by their very nature—and by the nature of democracy itself—experimental and in constant flux. Engaged scholars are not trying to set up a universal rule for the “best” method of engagement, but rather to respond to particular problems in democratic politics. All engaged scholarship addresses problems that are broadly “public” in nature, but some of them may be short-term and particular in nature while others may contribute to the common good in broad or long-term ways. Engaged scholarship can emphasize the processes of democratic decision-making or the substantive results of social transformation. Complete standardization would be neither possible nor desirable.

Still, a degree of clarity can help other scholars replicate these emerging practices, and shared meanings would help the field establish both intellectual

The scholarship of engagement recognizes that teaching, research, and any of the scholarly functions can be broadened to incorporate practices of democratic politics.
and political legitimacy. In tracking the activities of higher education civic work centers, I have been finding that the concept of the scholarship of engagement has been catching on. On the one hand, it is focused enough to capture the distinct qualities and contributions of engaged scholarship. The scholarship of engagement is not something that academics do on the side as opposed to “serious” scholarship. Rather, the scholarship of engagement has developed specific methods and criteria for assessment, and it is making identifiable contributions to academic disciplines on their own terms. On the other hand, the scholarship of engagement is an inclusive concept that reflects the great diversity in the theory and practice of this growing movement. The scholarship of engagement includes an exciting array of theoretical approaches toward the renewal of democratic politics, and it recognizes that teaching, research, and any of the traditional scholarly functions can be broadened to incorporate practices of democratic politics. Most of all, the concept is catching on because it is both scholarly and political, capturing both aspects of a distinct, growing, and exciting movement.

**NOTES**


Reprinted from Derek W. M. Barker, “Five Emerging Practices in the Scholarship of Engagement” Higher Education Exchange 2006, 64-72. This text has been lightly edited to conform with current Kettering Foundation style and citation guidelines.
CONTRIBUTORS

DEREK W. M. BARKER is a program officer at the Kettering Foundation and coeditor (with Alex Lovit) of the Higher Education Exchange. With a background in political theory, his research focuses on the democratic role of higher education institutions, philanthropy and nonprofit organizations, journalism, and the professions. Barker is the author of Tragedy and Citizenship: Conflict, Reconciliation, and Democracy from Haemon to Hegel and articles appearing in the academic journals Political Theory, New Political Science, Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement, and The Good Society.

HARRY C. BOYTE is a public intellectual and organizer. He founded Public Achievement and, with Trygve Throntveit and Marie Ström, the Institute for Public Life and Work. He holds the title of Senior Scholar in Public Work Philosophy at Augsburg University. Boyte is the author of 11 books, including Awakening Democracy through Public Work. His articles have appeared in more than 150 publications, including the New York Times, Political Theory, and the Chronicle of Higher Education. In the 1960s, Boyte was a field secretary for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Martin Luther King, Jr.'s organization, and subsequently did community organizing among low-income White residents in Durham, North Carolina.


JONI DOHERTY is a program officer at the Kettering Foundation. She conducts collaborative research with professionals working in cultural and educational institutions. These initiatives explore how to foster the disposition and skills needed for making decisions about public problems, both contemporary and historical, using deliberation. Doherty's essays have been published in Deliberative Pedagogy: Teaching and Learning for Democratic Engagement; Deliberation and the Work of Higher Education: Innovations for the Classroom, the Campus and the Community; and the Higher Education Exchange. Before coming to Kettering, she taught in the American Studies program at Franklin Pierce University and directed the New England Center for Civic Life. She holds a PhD in philosophy from the Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts.

SARA A. MEHLTRETTER DRURY is associate professor and chair of rhetoric at Wabash College and serves as the director of Wabash Democracy and Public Discourse. Drury's research and practice focus on the intersection of rhetoric and deliberative democracy, with attention to deliberative pedagogy, argumentation, and political communication. She has received grants from Indiana Humanities and the National Science Foundation and has been a visiting research fellow at the University of Edinburgh Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities and an Indiana Humanities Action fellow. Drury received her BA summa cum laude from Boston College and her MA and PhD from Pennsylvania State University.

MARIA FARLAND has taught at Johns Hopkins, Wesleyan, and Columbia universities and is currently an associate professor at Fordham University. She has published numerous scholarly essays on links between institutions of higher education and disciplinary expertise in relationship to literary writers such as Gertrude Stein, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Robert Frost. She is currently finishing a monograph on images of rural backwardness in US literature and culture and is coeditor of Studies in American Fiction (JHUP/ProjectMuse).
Katy J. Harriger is a professor in the Department of Politics and International Affairs at Wake Forest University, where she holds the F. Michael Crowley Distinguished Faculty Fellowship and is faculty director of the Wake Washington program in DC. She teaches courses on American politics, law, and courts. In addition to her research on deliberation and the civic engagement of young people, she publishes generally in the area of American constitutional law. At Wake Forest she has been the recipient of the Reid Doyle Prize for Excellence in Teaching, the John Reinhart Award for Distinguished Teaching, and the College Board of Visitors Faculty Leadership Award.

Matthew Johnson directs the Commission on Public Purpose in Higher Education. He cofounded and codirects the National Assessment of Service and Community Engagement. He also sits on the editorial board of Gateways: International Journal of Community Research and Engagement and has been recognized as an Ashoka Change Leader by the Ashoka Foundation. Johnson formerly served as president of Albion College, as a Carnegie visiting fellow at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, and as a fellow at the Doerr Institute for New Leaders at Rice University. Prior to his tenure at Albion College, Johnson served as associate dean of the College for Engaged Scholarship, as well as senior fellow and executive director of the Howard R. Sweater Center for Public Service at Brown University. Johnson led the development of a transformational strategic plan and oversaw the growth and development of curricular and cocurricular programs, including Brown in Washington, the Engaged Scholars Program, the Bonner Community Fellowship, the Brown University AmeriCorps VISTA Fellowship, Community Corps, and the Royce Fellowship.

Kara Lindaman is a professor of political science and public administration at Winona State University. Having earned her PhD from the University of Kansas, she studies the policy process and citizen engagement in wicked problems and primarily teaches courses in public administration. She is fortunate to have advised many student-citizens in public service. Since 2009, she has been the campus coordinator of the Association of American State Colleges and Universities American Democracy Project, where she is a civic fellow and has embraced numerous opportunities to work with colleagues and students as moderators and in democratic deliberation.

Alex Lovit is a program officer with the Kettering Foundation. He holds a PhD in history from the University of Michigan, where he studied 19th-century political history. He helps manage the foundation’s research into democratic education both in K-12 schools and in higher education, coordinates research into democratic innovation in the judicial system, and is the coeditor (with Derek W. M. Barker) of the Higher Education Exchange.

David Mathews served as president of the Kettering Foundation from 1981 to 2022. He is now president emeritus. He was secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare in the Ford administration and, before that, president of the University of Alabama. Mathews has written extensively on Southern history, public policy, education, and international problem-solving. His books include Politics for People: Finding a Responsible Public Voice; Reclaiming Public Education by Reclaiming Our Democracy; The Ecology of Democracy: Finding Ways to Have a Stronger Hand in Shaping Our Future; With the People: An Introduction to an Idea; Together: Building Better, Stronger Communities; and With: A Strategy for Renewing Our Democracy.

Jill J. McMillan is professor emerita and research professor at Wake Forest University. Her early work centered on organizational and institutional rhetoric and communication. Since 2000, she has been involved with a team of Wake Forest colleagues who study deliberative democracy in higher education and have published their work in Speaking of Politics and The Long-Term Impact of Learning to Deliberate. Articles connected to this work have appeared
in *Communication Education, Diversity and Democracy, Beyond Politics as Usual: Paths for Engaging College Students in Politics*, and the *Higher Education Exchange*. The team is currently assessing the degree to which deliberative democracy principles may have diffused into their institution over the past two decades.

SCOTT PETERS is a professor in the Department of Global Development at Cornell University. From 2012 to 2017, he served as faculty codirector of a national consortium, Imagining America: Artists and Scholars in Public Life, which is devoted to supporting engaged learning and research in the arts, humanities, and design fields. He currently serves as coeditor of a new Cornell University Press book series, *Publicly Engaged Scholars: Identities, Purposes, and Practices*. As a historical sociologist positioned in the newly emerging field of civic studies, Peters uses narrative inquiry and analysis tools to study the public purposes and work of academic professionals and institutions. His latest book, coauthored with Daniel J. O’Connell, is *In the Struggle: Scholars and the Fight Against Industrial Agribusiness in California*. Peters received a BS from the University of Illinois and an MA and PhD from the University of Minnesota.

B. DA’VIDA PLUMMER is a six-time Emmy award-winning news industry executive who joined Fellowships at Auschwitz for the Study of Professional Ethics as coexecutive director focusing on advancement and operations. She previously served in the dual capacity of assistant vice president for marketing/media and dean of the Scripps Howard School of Journalism and Communication at Hampton University. During her nine-year tenure with the prestigious HBCU, she served as an associate professor of broadcast journalism and the director of the William R. Harvey Leadership Institute while providing marketing leadership for the Hampton University Proton Therapy Institute. Plummer is a native of Nansemond County, Virginia, where she was introduced to the importance of community service through a global faith-based organization led by generations of her paternal lineage. She received her BS in journalism and MA in communications from Ohio University.

JOSEPH SCANLON is assistant professor of political science at Monroe Community College (MCC) in Rochester, New York. Dr. Scanlon’s teaching and research interests include American government, comparative politics, and international relations, with a specialized research interest in the global politics of sport. He is the coordinator of the Democracy Commitment at MCC, a campus initiative that promotes civic engagement and participation in civic education.

TIMOTHY J. SHAFFER is the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Chair of Civil Discourse and associate professor in the Joseph R. Biden, Jr. School of Public Policy and Administration at the University of Delaware. He is also director of civic engagement and deliberative democracy with the National Institute for Civil Discourse at the University of Arizona. Shaffer is author or coeditor of six books including *Deliberative Pedagogy: Teaching and Learning for Democratic Engagement*, *Creating Space for Democracy: A Primer on Dialogue and Deliberation in Higher Education*, and the latest book, *Grassroots Engagement and Social Justice through Cooperative Extension*. He earned his PhD from Cornell University.