Public Engagement in a Civic Mission: A Case Study

by Harry C. Boyte

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In 1997, the WK Kellogg Foundation invited the Center for Democracy and Citizenship[1] to undertake a planning process that explored the possibilities for strengthening the "public service mission of land-grant colleges and universities." The background was a growing national conversation about the discontents in American democracy—falling voting levels, widespread distrust among citizens toward each other and toward public institutions, signs of bitter divisions along cultural, racial, and economic lines. A few investigations, such as The Harwood Group's College Students Talk Politics, commissioned by the Kettering Foundation, had suggested that higher education mirrors and in many ways may bear some responsibility for the crisis in democracy. It found that while growing numbers of students participate in community service efforts, they see "politics" in highly negative terms. More generally, however, most of the commissions and studies of democracy neglected higher education as either a site for investigation of civic disengagement or as a potential contributor to democracy's renewal.

Against this background, the Civic Mission Project investigation undertaken by the Center for Democracy and Citizenship had several goals:

1) Development of a research base of public engagement traditions in land-grant schools;
2) Analysis of opportunities, interests, and obstacles to strengthened public engagement; and
3) Identification of at least one land-grant institution with a strong interest in renewing its civic mission.

The Center brought to this effort the practical philosophy of public work developed through its diverse partnerships with a number of institutions over the years. These included the College of St. Catherine in St. Paul, where a group of faculty has sought to apply and develop civic engagement and public work concepts since 1990.4

In our historical investigation, we followed the path of Scott Peters, a former graduate student researcher with the Center. Peters discovered that a "public work lens" illuminated histories of public education in 20th century America which have heretofore been largely unexplored.4

Our diagnosis of "the problem" and the solution to civic disengagement similarly drew from this theoretical framework. The public work approach highlights the public dimensions of work, both individually and institutionally. Thus it differs, in significant respects, from conventional liberal and communitarian approaches to citizenship and their attendant conceptions of democracy (See Appendix for the Obstacles to Civic Engagement).

In conventional terms, civic engagement is largely understood in communitarian terms, as "service" to others. This has the virtue of leading to important questions about what values institutions promote and embody: how students learn responsibility; the moral obligations of institutions of higher education to surrounding communities and the broader society. The service focus has, most specifically, generated a large and growing service-learning movement on campuses. Yet understanding citizenship as a function of "service" also has limitations. It locates active citizenship in the "voluntary sector" of civil society. It defines citizenship largely as off-hours voluntarism, detached from the core work of faculty, staff, students, and administrators and institutions as a whole.
Yet service experiences, however valuable they may be in teaching care and concern for others in young people’s immediate environment, have had little or no observable effect on their widespread feelings of cynicism, powerlessness, and profound distrust of public institutions of all kinds. For faculty and staff, calls to more service can sound simply hortatory, exhorting overworked and underappreciated people to “do more” and to “be better.”

The public work philosophy shifts attention to the question of work itself. It explores the public dimensions of professions, disciplines, and individual faculty experiences—and the erosion of those dimensions. What would it look like if teaching were a public activity, for example? What are the public conditions and effects of scholarship? What happens if faculty and staff see themselves as “public people,” in partnership with other citizens? What new resources might be tapped and cultivated? What new energies unleashed? The public work approach also proposes that it is essential to conceive of college cultures as living wholes, not mainly as aggregations of discrete units in competition with each other, calling particular attention to the public dimensions of such cultures.

Diagnosticslly, public work examines the forces contributing to the erosion of public cultures as modern institutions have become increasingly subject to a logic of rationalization that holds ends constant and fixed, and focuses on efficiency of means. “Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge? Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?” asked T. S. Elliot in his prophetic poem from 1937, “The Rock.” A public work perspective looks at the ways in which we have lost wisdom in knowledge, and knowledge in information. It asks questions about meaning and larger public purpose. It looks at how publics that act and the public cultures surrounding and sustaining such action might be revived and regrown in a modern, technological society. What does public action and public culture look like in institutions of higher learning and knowledge production, specifically? In many ways these are “radical” questions, not in conventional partisan terms of left or right but in etymological terms, going to the “roots” of our disciplines and our work.

Examination of these questions of civic meaning and of public purpose formed the themes for this report. They created the lens through which we looked at obstacles. They shaped the agenda of questions used in the interviews with faculty and administrators. Finally, they suggest the great challenge before us: how to renew the mission and purpose of higher education as an agent and architect of a vibrant and flourishing democracy?!

The tie between work and democracy was the genius of American democracy, but it was a tie relatively untheorized. The tie lingers in our time in the term “productive citizenship.” But as work has lost public overtones and become increasingly seen as a means to a paycheck which supports “free time” in leisure, civic identities have turned from producers to consumers of democracy. The institutions of higher education are positioned in an information age to effect a reversal and transformation of these trends in both intellectual and practical terms.
"When I came to the University of Minnesota in 1939, the Political Science department gave students credit for working in the community and on political campaigns. We had what some said was the finest internship program in the country."

"I thought of my job description as including work with communities. I believed in the 'Wisconsin idea' of public universities: the borders of the University were the borders of the state. I worked with the extension service in a rural public leadership program; there was a war of cultures at the University then. I felt pressure to focus only on publications. But I also had examples of rising stars like John Bodert in Geography, who went on to become a world-famous Regents Professor. John was working with communities to think through what factors make a small community grow and flourish or fail. John and I worked together all around the state. That was how we understood our work as faculty."

CHARLES BACKSTROM, Retired Professor, Political Science

"We need a language for talking about what we stand for. Right now, that isn't there."

MICHAEL MARTIN, Dean, College of Agriculture

From August to December 1997, the Center for Democracy and Citizenship conducted more than 30 interviews with faculty and administrators across the University of Minnesota. These created a foundation for a project on "Civic Mission."

The rural sociologist Mary Mims, a leader in the cooperative extension system who invented what was called the "community organizing approach" for extension work, argued in 1929 that, "We've been too much inclined to depend on beginning at the top in our efforts at reform. So-called 'social workers' cannot hammer a community into shape." Mims declared in her widely-read book, *The Awakening Community*, "if a community grows, it must do so from the inside." In subsequent years, the idea that powerful civic action must be grounded in the real life and relationships of a "community" has become central to the practice of networks such as the Industrial Areas Foundation network of large-scale citizen organizations.¹¹

Our strategy for interviewing was based on this approach, stressing the importance of grounding action in the life and relationships of the University, itself understood as a kind of "community." We do not claim to be comprehensive. But we sought to gain an overall sense of the University from the vantage of those who have been at the institution for some period of time: who had some concern for the larger purposes and meaning of the University; and who were widely respected by their peers as leaders. This method, too, was informed by the dimensions of the theory of public work which draw especially from populist theories of collective action and community organization.

We solicited the views of senior faculty, especially. Interviews were spread across the University, including the College of Liberal Arts (CLA), the Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs (HHH), Heath Sciences, the Institute of Technology (IT), and agricultural disciplines and other applied science programs on what is called the St. Paul Campus. We were impressed by the similarity of themes that emerged from different units, and how much the mood seemed to parallel that at other research universities, as reflected in recent studies.
Summary of Key Interview Themes:

MOOD: Faculty and administrators believe the University of Minnesota is at a moment of transition. Many feel overworked, underappreciated, and caught by conflicting demands. Some of the best work, especially in teaching and public service, is invisible. There is worry among a large number of faculty that bureaucratic and marketplace values are displacing academic values. Many feel that public culture and community have eroded. The tenure fight and organizing effort impacted faculty confidence and identity.

SCHOLARSHIP: Many senior faculty—the majority interviewed—express unhappiness with the way "scholarship" is currently defined, and are interested in taking up questions of scholarship, assessment, and rewards, and more broadly, theories of knowledge appropriate for a first-class research university, with a public service emphasis.

CIVIC LEADERSHIP: There is a "hunger" in many areas of the University for deeper public engagement, and a sense that rewards and norms should be aligned to make this possible. Members of the professoriate increasingly are convinced that the faculty must take leadership on such questions. "If we don't do the mission, it will be done to us."

"What we are finding is that faculty are caught between the times. They are held to one set of performance criteria coming out of an earlier era and reinforced at every turn by their graduate school experience. At the same time, faculty are expected to respond to the imperatives of a vigorous change agenda aimed at improving the quality of undergraduate learning, serving the larger community, and restructuring the institution to meet rapidly shifting needs."

EUGENE RICE, Director, Forum on Faculty Roles and Rewards, "Making a Place for the New American Scholar"

When Eugene Rice and others in the Forum on Faculty Roles and Rewards conducted interviews with faculty at research universities across the country, they found patterns that seem also true at the University of Minnesota: faculty feel caught between the times, overworked and underappreciated, in the midst of changing roles, expectations, even identities. Many note an erosion of a spirit of community and public culture in their departments and the university as a whole.

Faculty often said they have little time to read each other's work, even for promotion, tenure, and merit review. Some observed "a pulling back from the larger picture." People look out for their individual self-interests. "You don't look out for the college, or the interdisciplinary group, or in many cases even the department now," as one senior faculty who has been at the University for many years put it. Many others noted what they saw as a loss of overall identification and connection with the University. "My sense of attachment to the University overall has weakened over the years," said a faculty member in CLA. "Our identity as an institution has weakened." "We live in a balkanized community," said another. "There's a circle the wagons mentality," said one department chair. "Departments and individuals alike protect turf."

Many said that much of the best work—teaching and public service especially—tends to be relatively invisible. "We have a lot of pride in our work. We're engaged in a lot of collaboration with businesses and other institutions," said one leader in IT. "But it tends to be invisible. We're a little hunkered down in the University." Overload, speed-up, and a narrowing of perspective is a widespread perception. Many expressed dismay at the increase in red tape, bureaucracy, and paperwork. "There had been a vast increase in bureaucratic workload at the expense of educational mission over the last 24 years," said one faculty member who
has chaired the Council of Chairs. “You’re constantly put in a reactive mode, responding to demands to churn out more paper. That doesn’t build the intellectual infrastructure of the institution.”

A large number of faculty expressed the fear that “marketplace values” are overwhelming others: “The idea of ‘student as customer’ debases the relationship,” said one senior faculty member. “I had a student come in to see me not long ago. He said, ‘you changed my life years ago.’ People who think the faculty-student relationship is about customers completely miss that.” “Customer language and Incentive-Managed Growth leads to an entitlement mentality. Students think if they don’t get an A, it’s our fault.” “Marketplace values will destroy the university unless there is a balance,” said a senior leader in Agriculture. An English professor observed, “We feel the need for a more moral tone in the University. A sense of overall integrity.” One administrator in Health Sciences, observing the parallels between the “reengineering” of the health field and the University, argued that “in health, we need to see every interaction between the provider and the patient as a civic act. There are always values involved. If we let simply the market take over it will be very damaging.” “We’re losing the academic and liberal tone of the University,” said one Humanities scholar, who argued that “things are measured increasingly by how many bodies you can pull in. There’s alarm about the anti-intellectual implications of Incentive-Managed Growth.” Another CLA professor argued that, “Our values are getting inverted, with things that should be central now on the periphery. We need to regain a balance between responding to market pressures and liberal and civic values.” Some warned of thinking the problem was simply “corporatization”: there is a large dynamic (to which many businesses in our time are also subject) which tends toward “rationalization,” holding ends constant and fixed and focusing simply on efficient means. This is a well-known intellectual concept—Max Weber’s “iron cage” of technical rationality; or the “managerial mindset” associated with the spread of the cult of efficiency. It seems to be afflicting institutions across the board in American society, draining them of public purpose and a vibrant sense of mission and spirit.

Finally, recent controversies like the tenure fight and the organizing effort had a major impact on people’s level of trust, public engagement, and even identity. “People are wary,” said one faculty member in the medical school. “The union failed because people were worried about another bureaucracy—not because we’re confident.” Many also felt a new level of cohesion and power. “The tenure fight increased people’s sense of political efficacy,” observed one political scientist. “People became involved and it worked.” As one professor put it, faculty have begun to think more broadly, in institution-wide terms. “We will do mission and own it, or it will be done to us,” was a not uncommon sentiment.

“The scholarship produced by [the current] system can best be described as ‘self-referential.’ Far too many academics write to be judged by other academics who are remarkably like themselves. Narrow disciplines are split into even narrower subfields, as fewer people constitute the audience for whom scholarship is written.”

“There would be little wrong if this winnowing produced valuable knowledge, as it often does in the sciences. But in the humanities and the social sciences, the system often produces perverse results. Instead of sharpening knowledge, specialization dulls it; the audience, being small, also feels beleaguered. Sharing a tiny corner of the world, scholars have little need for the rigorous clarity imposed by the need to make one’s ideas available to outsiders.”

ALAN WOLFE, Higher Education Exchange, 1997
Alan Wolfe, one of the nation’s premier sociologists, in the article quoted defended a conservative methodology of scholarship. He upheld what might be called “the German model,” the ideal of the individual scholar alone in the library in pursuit of knowledge “for its own sake.” Such a model of scholarship is supposedly associated with the “scientific researcher,” who seeks objectivity though philosophers of science have pointed out that scientific inquiry is far more social and open-ended.

Nonetheless, Wolfe also offered a critique of dominant patterns of research and faculty rewards as sharp as any partisan of public scholarship these days. Perhaps the most surprising conclusion from the interviews at the University of Minnesota was how widely Wolfe’s views of the flaws in the current system seem to be shared by senior faculty. There are obviously obstacles to change in definitions of scholarship at the University, but the moment seems ripe for the topic.

In 1990, Ernest Boyer’s Scholarship Reconsidered, a study of the professoriate for the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, launched a wide re-examination of the ways scholarship is defined, practiced, and rewarded at major research universities. Boyer argued that the current reward system privileges what he called the “scholarship of discovery”—individualized scholarship based on basic research, drawing especially from the model of experimental science. He proposed that three other forms of scholarship deserve equal emphasis: “the scholarship of integration,” which “makes connections across disciplines, placing the specialties in larger context, illuminating data in a revealing way;” “the scholarship of application,” or more public scholarship, which is based on “the application of knowledge to consequential problems” and often draws its research questions from interactions with publics; and “the scholarship of teaching,” which not only is about the transmission of knowledge but its transformation and extension in the learning process.

To date, most discussion and debate surrounding Boyer’s argument have been among administrators. Yet there are signs that faculty are beginning to engage these questions. A three year faculty-led process at Oregon State University recently focused on definitions of scholarship and the institution’s process of evaluating it. The faculty concluded that scholarship needs to be more broadly defined, as “creative intellectual work that is validated by peers and communicated” in a variety of ways—by no means limited to refereed journals. It should be understood to include discovery, development and integration of knowledge, and also creative artistry. Conrad Weiser, a leader in the process, has noted that “faculty understanding and acceptance of this concept of scholarship were remarkably widespread and enthusiastic.” Most are convinced that “standards of performance are likely to be raised rather than lowered” by the new definitions and evaluation methods, which include individualized job descriptions for every faculty member at the university.

At the University of Minnesota, only a few defended current approaches to defining and evaluating scholarship, though they were vociferous: “Our first priority should be to attract cutting-edge scholars,” said one. “We need to worry about our national rankings much more.”

Far more common was the sense that scholarship is balkanized and narrow. “There’s a loss of public judgment about each other’s work. People don’t read each other’s files because we’re too busy,” said one faculty. A sense of loss of intellectual community in some departments also emerges clearly: “E-mail is balkanizing our department. People prefer to talk to colleagues elsewhere.” “The journal review process already evaluates the work; we think, ‘what more could we add?’” Operative definitions of scholarship are contro-
versial. "To date, a good deal of the most creative intellectual work is not well-recognized in the whole promotion and tenure review process," said one senior scholar. Another observed that public journalism and similar work oriented toward broader publics simply does not count for tenure, promotion, or merit review. "We have people who do public scholarship, who interact with wide publics on important topics, but it is not regarded as scholarship by current definitions. It creates hard feelings." Overall, most agreed that coming to some clearer definition of scholarship is central to a robust sense of mission and the articulation of the actual values that the University embodies: "What we define as scholarship is a fight about what you value, a fight for the future," said one leading scholar.

"Most of the American institutions of higher education are filled with the modern democratic spirit of serviceability. Teachers and students alike are profoundly moved by the desire to serve the democratic community...All the colleges boast of the serviceable men they have trained, and regard the serviceable patriot as their ideal product. This is a thoroughly democratic conception of their function."

CHARLES ELLIOT, President of Harvard, 1908

"We've been talking a lot in our department about how to be less cloistered. How can we relate to a broader audience for our scholarship?"

SHIRLEY GARNER, Chair, English Department

"The future of public universities depends on redefining their public commitments. Research is better, and teaching is far more lively, if faculty are involved in public issues."

ROBERT BRUININKS, Provost

The University of Minnesota is part of a land-grant and public university tradition which once strongly tied mission to conceptions of public service, and self-consciously combined practical with liberal education. By the early 20th century, the ideas of higher education's public service mission had spread widely, affecting even elite private institutions such as Harvard. At the end of the 20th century, notions of—and rewards for—public engagement had eroded. Nonetheless, our interviews suggest that faculty and administrators are beginning to look "outward" and think about how norms and rewards might better align with public commitments.

Many faculty members emphasized that given current norms and rewards, the first years at the University strongly discourage public service. "For my first years here the message I got was unmistakable: focus only on publishing," as one summarized. On the other hand, most interviewed also thought public service or public engagement is undervalued: "We need to deepen the public nature of our work across the board at the University," said one administrator. "This should apply even in some of the 'hardest research' areas."

Evidence in at least some fields suggests the benefits of public engagement. Once recent survey of scholars taking part in humanities council programs in California revealed that 90% percent reported a positive influence on their scholarship, and 82 percent a positive influence on their teaching. On the basis
of his own observations over the years, Jamil Zainaldin, director of the Federation of State Humanities Councils, argues that "for scholars truly engaged in a public program (hit and run doesn’t count), enrichment is practically inevitable."

Many faculty at the University of Minnesota voice similar views about benefits from deeper or more extensive public engagements. "There is a palpable hunger from faculty to be more involved in the world," said one historian. Only one expressed strong reservations about making "public service" or "public engagement" more rewarded. "I’m a little negative about a greater emphasis on public engagement. I think we need to upgrade our emphasis on first-class scholarship. Harvard can afford to pay more attention to public engagement — everybody quotes Harvard professors."

There is a growing discussion about the "partnership" approach to public engagement at the University of Minnesota — connecting with communities in a collaborative, interactive mode. In earlier research, the Center for Democracy and Citizenship uncovered a civic history of land-grant institutions in the first several decades of the 20th century which adds two important elements to public service. In the first place, public universities, once understood as "people’s colleges," "of the commonwealth, by the commonwealth, and for the commonwealth," encouraged patterns of outreach that explicitly integrated public engagement with research and teaching. All were understood to be interactive and mutually reinforcing, not competitive pursuits. "Practical" knowledge — especially knowledge that enhanced economic productivity and growth — was seen as inextricably and necessarily linked with "democratic," "civic," and "liberal" knowledge that cultivated breadth of perspective and robust democratic practices.

Secondly, outreach or service activities, including the dissemination of specialized knowledge and expertise, was understood to be best carried out as part of collaborative "public work," work by a mix of people that produced public benefits for the commonwealth. Public service was not simply "for" communities and citizens. Skills of collaborative work "with" others were highly prized. Moreover, faculty and student self-interests, broadly understood, were embedded in such work: the professoriate imagined themselves and were imagined as part of the civic community, not apart from it.

Awareness of this tradition has recently spread, especially on the St. Paul campus where Scott Peters, previously an historical researcher with the Center, now holds the position of "Extension Specialist in Public Scholarship and Public Work." "The idea of partnership takes us back to our roots early in the 20th century," said one faculty member on the St. Paul campus. "Civic engagement should be seen as catalyzing citizen work, not simply doing things for people."

Others pointed out the need for faculty and other constituencies to learn how to engage in a "partnership" or "public work" approach. "There is a lot of difference in public engagement between the expert model and the public work or partnership model," said one professor in CLA. "The partnership model usually works better, but the problem is, most faculty haven’t had much experience in it," argued one department chair. In a similar vein, an administrator in Health Sciences observed that "partnership" approaches require learning new skills and approaches for a lot of faculty: "To do public engagement well, we need to pay attention to dimensions like culture, that we’ve never considered much."
Most felt that for public engagements to become more visible and widely practiced—for the norms to change—it will take strong leadership and broad changes in reward patterns. "There's almost no recognition for public commitments," said one senior faculty member involved in community affairs. "No one in the department ever mentions it to me when I do things beyond the U [University]." One dean argued that the University needs a range of ways to reward service or public engagement, in order to change the norms and messages to young faculty in his unit. "Especially, we need examples of senior faculty whose public involvements have improved and enriched their scholarship."

"Men in a mass society are gripped by personal troubles which they are not able to turn into social issues...The knowledgeable man in a genuine public, on the other hand...understands that what he thinks and feels to be personal troubles are very often also problems shared by others, and more importantly, not capable of solution by any one individual but only by modification of the group in which he lives..."

C. Wright Mills, The Sociological Imagination, 1959

Faculty and administrators voiced the conviction that the University of Minnesota is at a moment of transition, in the aftermath of the tenure fight and the union campaign. "The creation of land-grants represented the de-denominialization of higher education. We need another round—the de-corporatizing of the university," said one administrator on the St. Paul campus. Some argue that leadership can make a large difference. "People are hungry for leadership that says, 'here is a direction.' Not a dictator—but someone who proposes clear ideas."

Many expressed views like that of C. Wright Mills many years ago: the only way to turn "personal troubles" into action is to make them matters of public concern and deliberation. "We need to make these issues public. Most people don't talk beyond their friendship circle." There was a general agreement that change will require shifts in rewards and institutional priorities: "Change isn't going to happen unless there is change in the norms and rewards." Finally, many faculty believe that the questions of mission, rewards, scholarship, and public engagement need to be taken up by the faculty—they can't be mainly the province of administrators. "We will take up the mission ourselves—or it will be done to us," as one observed.
[1] This report is based on more than 30 interviews conducted by Harry Boyte and Edwin Fogelman of the University of Minnesota Political Science Department, with faculty and administrators at the University of Minnesota. They were conducted between August and December 1997 with a complementary set of interviews with staff, students, and external stakeholders. This report also draws upon the project proposal, *Public Engagement in a Civic Mission*, co-authored by Boyte and Fogelman, with extensive input from the staff of the Center for Democracy and Citizenship.

The Center for Democracy and Citizenship has its origins at the Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs in 1987 in public engagement (or, conventionally, “outreach”) projects that focused on developing practical theory for public and civic engagement grounded in on-the-ground civic experiments, informed by rigorous scholarship and political theory. The Center’s signature initiative, Public Achievement, has gained international recognition as a premier example of civic education for young people.

From 1993-1995, the Center coordinated a national nonpartisan initiative called the “New Citizenship,” funded in part by the Ford Foundation, that worked with the White House Domestic Policy Council, the Whitman Center at Rutgers University, the Council for the Advancement of Citizenship, the Kettering Foundation, and others. The New Citizenship analyzed the citizen-government divide and proposed strategies based on best practices for the renewal of public cultures and practices in government. The New Citizenship project found parallels in many federal agencies to the dilemmas, challenges, and opportunities facing the University of Minnesota, among other settings.


Obstacles to Civic Engagement

As part of the planning for the civic mission project at the University of Minnesota, the Center for Democracy and Citizenship was charged with the question, what are the obstacles to substantial civic engagement in a major, modern research university like Minnesota? The following were the key obstacles identified:

1) Erosion of broad public purposes

There are powerful internal and external pressures that push the university's mission, organization, and activities toward a narrow focus on efficiency and marketplace criteria. The university is not an isolated ivory tower in this regard. Colleges and universities are subject to the same forces in the society that tend to recast every relationship in terms of the "disciplines of the marketplace" and a logic of rationalization which holds ends as constant and fixed, and looks to the most efficient means. In government, such dynamics have redefined citizens as "customers"; watchwords are "efficiency" and "privatization." Market principles in government, as in other public settings, have uses, but when questions of means are not put in the context of larger public purposes and broad democratic values widely and deeply engaged by the citizenry, democracy itself suffers gravely.

At land-grant and public universities, marketplace and rationalizing pressures take the form of proposals to make colleges more responsive to the demands of students defined as customers. Allocation of resources and faculty effort are pushed toward their most remunerative uses with a slighting of other institutional values. As counterpoint to such internal changes, the traditional mission of public service takes on a commercial cast, aimed at meeting the needs of public relations, private companies, and government agencies. This dynamic often renders the meaning of public mission as public-private partnerships for the sake of economic growth and competitive advantage. While such partnerships have value, they are far from the full, rich range of work with communities and citizens conveyed by the public university as an instrument of democracy. Overall, the question of how to integrate the uses of the market into a larger set of public purposes and principles is of critical importance—and still largely unexplored.

All these dynamics have been operative at the University of Minnesota specifically. Over the last ten years, Minnesota has been in a reactive mode according to most faculty, administrators, and staff we interviewed. It has responded to economic pressures with tendencies toward over-regulation, bureaucracy, and wide use of marketplace categories like "student as customer." "Every time something goes wrong we create a dozen rules," as Robert Bruininks, University Provost, puts it. The result has been a drawing back from a larger connection to the whole. "A relatively decentralized institution like the University works well when there is a strong sense of common purpose," says one senior financial administrator. "But over the last decade, that sense of common vision and direction has greatly weakened." In the last two years, these pressures culminated in a tenure fight, paralleled by a nearly successful union-organizing campaign among the faculty.

2) Loss of community and a sense of collective efficacy

The cultures of research-oriented public universities are highly "privatized," in ways remarkably forecast by C. Wright Mills' 1959 description of "men in a mass society [who] are gripped by personal troubles which they are not able to turn into social issues." Cultures are increasingly competitive, individualist, and
characterized by a "star system." Pressures toward competition and individualism are generated by current definitions of scholarship, reward, and evaluation. Faculty identifications are drawn away from the local civic community, and toward disciplinary and subdisciplinary reference groups. Faculties live in dread of erosion of their placement in national rankings: practices are shaped by disciplinary peer review. Moreover, faculty are socialized through their career training and their work life to think of their work in highly-individualized, private terms in ways that make it difficult to believe in the possibility of effective cooperative action that can bring about change.

3) Restrictive theories of knowledge

Current, dominant theories of knowledge and scholarship tend strongly to detach faculty from an interest in civic mission and public engagement as legitimate aspects of professional work. Scholarly bias has long slighted what the Greeks called phronesis, or knowledge gained through engagement with the public world, and privileged sophia, or the ideal of the detached and isolated scholar. In the 20th century, ideals and models of higher education derived from German universities and drawn from scientific inquiry became overwhelmingly dominant in working understandings of scholarship and research. Faculty at research-oriented universities present are largely unaware of topics like "rethinking scholarship" and its epistemological assumptions, or the "engaged university."

4) Historical amnesia about the civic mission in public and land-grant universities

Basic features of land-grant and public universities’ civic histories are largely unknown to most faculty, staff, and administrators. Without a historical grounding, a sense that public universities were once different and far more engaged in partnerships with the public, it is difficult to imagine a renewed public mission.

5) A flawed theoretical map of "civic engagement"

Shaped not only by reigning theories of knowledge and current reward and evaluation practices, but also by current dominant theories of citizenship, public involvements today tend to be conceived as off-hours "volunteerism" or "service," detached from the core work of faculty, staff, students, and the institution as a whole. Active citizenship is imagined to be mainly practiced in a "civil society" of community and voluntary life. Even in stronger terms, "service" is imagined as one-way expert interventions in the life of communities. In the first instance, public universities see "service" in relatively weak and secondary ways, as off-hours obligations that have an internal orientation (e.g., serving on university committees), or if external (e.g., "outreach"), are detached from core mission and the self-interests of the institution, the professoriate, and the staff. In the second case, public service is a one-directional effort to "help" or enlighten, rather than a partnership in which members of the university and the community work together to create things of public usefulness. There are today many instances of more interactive public engagements. In the best of cases, public engagements form venues for the integration of first-rate scholarship and teaching with public service. Yet faculty involved in such efforts nonetheless regularly feel precarious, liable to the judgment that scholarship that results from public engagement is not "real scholarship."
The public work philosophy shifts attention to the question of work itself. It explores the public dimensions of professions, disciplines, and individual faculty experiences—and the erosion of those dimensions.

Harry C. Boyte