“The work of history (is) to free the truth — to break down the walls of isolation and of class interest which hold it in and under. Truth only becomes free when it distributes itself to all so that it becomes the Commonwealth.”

— John Dewey
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Going Public: Academics and Public Life

by Harry C. Boyte
INTRODUCTION:
THE POLITICS OF PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE

by Harry C. Boyte

Colleges and universities, argues Nancy Cantor, chancellor of the University of Illinois, are best conceived as occupying a boundary-crossing space. They are “off to the side,” animated by principles of reflection, experimentation, even playfulness with unorthodox ideas not subject to immediate instrumental use. But they are nonetheless also deeply involved in the public life of their communities, the broader society and the world.

Yet many people today view higher education as an ivory tower detached from the real problems of our world, or even, as part of the problem itself. And, with increasing frequency, the public perception is confirmed by those who practice within the walls. These gated academic enclaves have evolved over a half-century. Changes were shaped in part by forces that made American society as a whole less public, more oriented toward technical solutions to problems, more driven by private and consumer images of the good life. As Thomas Bender puts it in the introduction to Academic Cultures in Transformation:

The disciplines were redefined over the course of the half century following the [second world] war; from the means to an end they increasingly became an end in themselves, the possession of the scholars who constituted them. . . . Academics sought some distance from civics.

The academic culture at many of today’s colleges and universities has produced a widespread sense of powerlessness in their faculties, disappointment in their students, and dismissiveness from the public at large. American democracy has never been in more need of the best values of higher education — open discussion, careful attention to evidence, intellectual exploration, and freewheeling debate that aims at developing a larger truth. Yet, with important exceptions, higher education has been remote from the public debate in recent years.
One of the most elemental motivations for the civic engagement movement developing in higher education today is to rebuild political ties to citizenry that have seriously weakened in recent years.

“When I came to the University of Minnesota in 1959,” says retired professor Charles Backstrom, “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 . . . [but] there was a war of cultures at the university. I felt increasing pressure to focus only on publications.”

The land grant and public university tradition whose loss Backstrom describes at institutions like the University of Minnesota involved sustained, reciprocal partnerships with citizens that were seen as the foundation for public scholarship and excellent teaching. Paul Stone, an intellectual historian of the West, argues that public universities came to embody a distinctive combination of work-centered, practical, and cultured elements in American democracy — symbolized by the frontier tradition of log cabins with extensive libraries which had so taken the French observer Alexis de Tocqueville in his travels of the 1830s. As Stone described:

“The Ivy Leagues represented an elite tradition. Duke was the quintessential church university for the creation of a southern elite. In contrast, the big public universities were considered to be bellwethers for the integration of learned life, a literate population, civil society, and popular politics.

Public universities were dedicated to democratic experimentalism, an open atmosphere, the combination of professional and liberal arts education, and interaction with the larger society. As Minnesota’s founding president, William Watts Folwell put it: the university aimed to be comprehensive and broad in its range of knowledge, “an institution in which any person can find instruction in any subject.”

In 1997-1998, the Center for Democracy and Citizenship at the University of Minnesota undertook an examination of the possibilities for renewing the university’s public land grant mission. We interviewed dozens of faculty, as well as stakeholders in the broader community.
Faculty and administrators alike believed that the University of Minnesota was at a moment of transition. Faculty felt caught between the times, overworked and underappreciated, in the midst of changing roles, expectations, even identities. Many noted the erosion of the spirit of community, connection, and public culture in their departments and in the university as a whole. Others noted a loss of overall identification with the university. “My sense of attachment to the university overall has weakened over the years,” said one faculty member in the College of Liberal Arts. “We live in a balkanized community,” said another. “There’s a circle-the-wagons mentality,” one department chair remarked. “Departments and individuals alike protect turf.”

Many said much of their best work — engaged teaching and public scholarship, especially — is invisible.

The consequence of the erosion of education’s civic mission was identified 70 years ago by Paul Hanna, writing for the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in 1937:

*With no sense of belonging to a great enterprise which demands their loyalties and their labors, with no responsibility for making a contribution to the larger group, the young develop few of those character traits which are so essential and basic in a highly interdependent society ... to harness the energy of youth to the task of progressively improving conditions of community life — that is the supreme challenge to educational and social statesmanship.*

Hanna’s words illustrate the emphasis that educators once placed on the connection between productive civic engagement and civic learning opportunities for young people. It is an experience faculty members have begun to help create again, for their students and sometimes for themselves.

*Going Public* recounts the stories of some of these faculty who have traveled beyond the walls of a culture that stresses detachment and private pursuits and “knowledge for its own sake” without regard for public impact. And they have traveled many paths to get there. They are the stories of people described by famed social worker Jane Addams as committed and engaged professionals who recognize that they “breathe the same air” as the rest of humanity.
All of them have found different means of achieving the same end. And for each of them it has been a life-changing experience. Some, like Lorraine Gutierrez, Sylvia Hurtado, and Julie Ellison, grew up in homes where community activism, public engagement, and politics were a given. For them, it was a question of shaping their academic careers to that end or, in some cases reclaiming earlier interests covered over by years of conventional careers. Others — among them, John Saltmarsh, Cathy Jordan, and Nan Kari — found their way slowly but surely by building bridges that opened up two-way traffic between their institutions and their communities. Still others — Sallye McKee, Michael Schudson, David Scobey, and Bill Doherty — were probably headed that way in any case. They experienced clarifying moments that set them firmly on the path to civic engagement.

We begin in a seemingly unlikely arena: the field of chemical engineering. Kenneth Keller’s account sets the stage for our other stories by suggesting a new way to look at the norms of scholarship, not just in the science but in the social sciences and humanities as well.

About the author:

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Science is an extremely social enterprise. Within its system, science is much more a civic enterprise than almost anything else. It requires cooperation. It requires respect. It requires listening. All the things that are virtues in a society are virtues in science.

The story of the change in chemical engineering is instructive. Up to the early 1950s, the field was defined in terms of its applications. We studied particular industries — oil refining, chemicals, building materials, and so forth. We focused on the various technical tasks of scaling up chemical reactions to work at industrial volumes, figuring out different separation schemes such as distillation, fractionation, liquid-liquid extraction, and we taught courses with titles such as “Unit Operations,” “Chemical Plant Processes,” — even “Crushing and Grinding.”

In the 1950s, chemical engineers began to realize that there were underlying theoretical constructs and approaches that united the many parts of chemical engineering and were quite independent of the particular applications. These unifying themes, new insights into the very structure of the field, became the basis of a revolution in which the curriculum changed entirely.

The new structure vastly increased the range of application of the techniques. Chemical engineers like me began to examine physiological phenomena, the etiology of disease, and new therapies, and found that our kind of insights complemented those of other medical scientists and gave rise to great advances. Others found that they could model the bio/geo-chemical world and understand meteorology and global environmental phenomena, or the life cycle of lakes, or air pollution, or a host of other “applications” that had previously not been viewed as related to chemical engineering.

At about the same time, the basic sciences that had served the field — physics and chemistry — turned almost entirely to molecular approaches. This left undeveloped an enormous amount of continuum-based, or phenomenological science that was much more
applicable to the kinds of things that chemical engineers did. As a result, the field of chemical engineering rechristened itself “chemical engineering science,” undertaking new studies that were driven by the ultimate applications. [These were] no less fundamental than molecular studies, but much more driven by the applications to which the new understanding would be put.

In scholarship, the measure had always been made along a spectrum that assumed that the most abstract and the deepest scholarship was that which was farthest removed from public purposes. We created this artificial linear and single dimension. It was a line, a one-dimensional metric, which assumed that something that was fundamental would have no obvious application, or if it had an application, if it was applied, then it wasn’t very fundamental. That took hold in people’s views.

First of all it was wrongheaded. And second, it allowed a person to say that his or her work was not particularly applicable to anything and, therefore, it must be basic. This was much more attractive than saying that it might be trivial!

Don Stokes’ book, *Pasteur’s Quadrant*, looks at fundamental science and takes issue with the idea that science could be placed on this linear axis between basic and applied. It asks, where are you going to put Louis Pasteur? Louis Pasteur invented microbiology. He did the most fundamental work possible. And he did it for the most applied reason — he was interested in why wine goes sour.

The mistake is to measure the “appliedness” of something on the same axis as its “basicness.” You really have to look at application along an orthogonal coordinate, a y coordinate, and basic research along a horizontal coordinate. If you do that, you form quadrants. You have Pasteur in the upper-right quadrant, high-quality work that is both basic and applied.

You might look at Niels Bohr and say, his work was not very applied but it is extremely important in advancing basic understanding. That would place it in the upper-left quadrant.
Thomas Edison is not very basic but highly applied. His work would fit in the lower-right quadrant.

So the mistake we have been making is to conflate two different measures into a single linear measure. This led scholars to say if there’s an application to what I do it can’t be of very great depth.

It’s simply a mistake. There probably is an analogy to this Pasteur’s quadrant that one can take with research broadly, by not looking at its fundamental nature on the same axis as its application to society. I think we need to do that and, in a sense, in earlier days of public universities, we did do that.
I grew up in Southern California, in South Pasadena, a suburb of Pasadena. It is a small community of about 20,000. My father’s family has been in that region since the 1820s. My mother was born in Mexico and came to the U.S. during the Mexican Revolution as a toddler. She grew up in segregated mining towns in Arizona and Texas, along the border.

My grandparents were both educated, of middle-class backgrounds in Mexico. My grandfather was sent to be a missionary by the church, the Methodists, to work with Spanish-speaking communities and immigrants. A lot of the impetus for my work comes from that tradition.

My grandparents established schools in the communities. They provided health services. They had eight children, and seven survived.
Most became schoolteachers. At that time, it was very hard to get higher education. It was during the Great Depression. Arizona State University was a normal school, and segregated. They couldn’t live in the residence halls. It was a real struggle.

The whole idea of getting educated was to be a teacher serving your community. There was an ethos in that branch of the family around participation and community. There was never a question while I was growing up that it was a significant part of what we were expected to do.

The notion was that you have a public work, regardless of what your job is. Both my parents were public schoolteachers.

I went to graduate school at the University of Chicago interested in urban history, Jane Addams and Edith Abbot, Lillian Wald, and other people who were doing things around the country in that era. I didn’t just want to study history. I wanted to be involved in making history. I was able to seek out faculty who worked out of the boxes.

When I graduated, I wanted to work in the battered women’s area. I was hired by an organization in New York, called Victim Services Agency, to set up a safe-home network for battered women. That involved a lot of community work. In my spare time I was involved with a collective that put out a progressive social work journal called Catalyst.

The thing that motivated me to get my Ph.D. was my displeasure with the field of social work and the scholarship people were doing in social work. It was totally disconnected from the real work people were doing every day. There was almost nothing in the literature that would help us do our jobs better. I wanted to have an influence in changing the discipline, making it more social justice-oriented in the broadest sense of that term.
Sylvia Hurtado

Sylvia Hurtado is associate professor of Education at the University of Michigan. Her research, showing that diverse cultural and racial environments in higher education can lead to a number of enhanced educational outcomes, was part of the expert testimony for the University of Michigan’s brief to the Supreme Court in defense of affirmative action.

I grew up in San Antonio before there was economic development in the Mexican American community. At that time, in the 1970s, Communities Organized for Public Service, or COPS, had begun to organize Mexican Americans in the impoverished barrios of the South Side and West Side where I lived.

The big issue was the streets. They were terrible. Rains had torn them up. People were fed up. Everybody’s car would get stuck. The sheer fact that we couldn’t walk in our streets was galvanizing. We knew we had to make a change. It led to other issues.

When I graduated from high school, in the mid-1970s, it was a time of incredible change. There were people, mostly women, talking about power. They were people we knew well, who were there and engaged. You felt this was a natural thing that we ought to do. The wonderful thing was that churches allowed a space for that to happen. I don’t know what other vehicle would have worked in that community.

The experience made a great impact on a high school student who was a little bit of a rebel herself. I knew what they were about. It’s how I first became a political person.

I learned a lot about multiculturalism from being in a predominantly white institution. Because our numbers were small, we thought we would have to build coalitions if we were going to have a voice. I got involved in protest. The issue was divestment from South Africa. We had to build various coalitions of organizations. How would I be able to relate to the South African issue? I had never been outside the United States except to Mexico. All that happened through peers. The research I do now is based on peer learning and it comes from that understanding.
I grew up in the fifties in a family where the culture was all about the printed word. My father was a writer, editor, and self-avowed New Dealer. He had seen his family saved by the New Deal programs. My mother, who had worked as a proofreader on *Look* magazine, later became managing editor of a journal. My parents started a little magazine in their basement, an intellectual digest with articles from little magazines, as well as bigger magazines like *Scientific American* and *Punch*, from all over the world.

I learned from my parents about the materiality of writing. There was this world of people involved in writing, and we were part of it. Words took form, got published, went out, and people read them. There was a community of knowledge. And power. I learned that you could write things that made people angry. You could defy with spirit. You had the power of making culture yourself through print media.

At Harvard I was looking for a culturally enriched radical politics, where there could be a sense of play, joy, invention, and intelligence, where you could be articulate and smart and draw on what you actually knew, and learn more. It was hard to find. After a time out of school, I spent one semester trying to figure out how to be an intellectual who integrated politics and social science, but I wasn’t connecting with being a radical social scientist.

I went to summer school that year and took a poetry course. There’s a major at Harvard called history and literature, I was told. I threw myself into it and became a scholar. I didn’t forget about politics, but I fell in love with scholarship.
Years pass. I write books. I get tenure. I become graduate chair.

I liked being part of an institution, being in a group, having tenure. But I discovered that people think the world ends with “the profession.” I never liked the boundaries. For a long time my discontent expressed itself in interdisciplinary ways, challenging borders. Departmental life can be ridiculous in political terms. There is a deliberate self-limitation, almost self-wounding when we humanists are faced with larger agendas. We struggle to make public claims.

As associate vice president for Research at Michigan in 1995, I developed something called The Year of Humanities and Arts (YOHA). I used YOHA as an organizing tool. I would go to Washington with our associate vice president, our lobbyist, to meet the people I wanted to bring to the conference. I took eight trips to Washington, met the Michigan delegation, the NEA and NEH, and got tutored. I ended up on the Michigan State Humanities Council, as a result of this process of socialization. The council was an adult learning group for me.

On the council, there were people who were truly expert in the best sense, outstanding at what they did. Everybody was a humanist, and had a passion for what they did. Some were in colleges and universities. But the people who really had an impact on me were not in universities. There was Gloria Coles, an African American woman who runs the public library in Flint. She understood her role in that library as an educator and an organizer. I drove through Flint neighborhoods with Gloria once. She knew how each house came to be built and who built them and what the neighborhood was like. These children waved, and she knew every one and their parents. She operates nationally and in the neighborhood, and connects them.

Frank Ettawageshik has been one of my mentors. Frank is a fabulous politician and organizer. He’s a potter and storyteller. He was tribal council chair. When he became tribal council chair he quickly got federal recognition for his tribe. He’s the person who teaches me about leadership.

I learned how to become much more strategic. I could see that when I went to Washington to lobby for the National Endowment for the Humanities, it was more effective if I were with Sharon Wise, my colleague on the Michigan Humanities Council board. She was on the Republican National Committee, and the State Board of Education. I probably disagree with her on all sorts of positions, except on support for the NEH. She’s a damn-good lobbyist for the NEH.
My scholarship has changed, too. Now I’m starting a book on World Poetry Day and civic poetry movements, through which people organize poetry in ways that connect it to democratic values.

Imagining America is about changing people. I would love to move everybody into something like the Michigan Humanities Council, an adult collectivity of learning, something that is community-based but also goes beyond the local level, something that is concrete but also speculative.

It’s what happened to me. I put a toe in the stream, and once I was in the stream I was in a flow that was changing me. It will be a different experience for everybody. There are a million different places and a million different ways to enter the stream, but once you step in you will become something else that you didn’t imagine in the beginning.
BUILDING BRIDGES

John Saltmarsh, Cathy Jordan, and Nan Kari have considerably different careers and experiences. One-time history professor John Saltmarsh has become a national leader in the civic engagement movement through his association with Campus Compact. Neuropsychologist Cathy Jordan proved to be a highly successful “bridge builder” and boundary crosser between the research culture at the University of Minnesota and the low-income Phillips neighborhood in Minneapolis. Nan Kari tells of the small world she experienced in her profession in contrast to its luminous ideals, and the liberation she experienced through the introduction of political methods and concepts into her work. But all recount the profound changes they have personally undergone in the process of building bridges. Their stories turn the notion of “outside expert” on its head, in significant ways — showing how much academics have to learn from the public world.

John Saltmarsh

John Saltmarsh, formerly a professor at Northeastern University in Boston, now directs the Project on Integrating Service with Academic Study as a scholar in residence at National Campus Compact.

One of my first experiences with service-learning was having students provide service at Rosie’s Place, a homeless shelter in Roxbury, a neighborhood bordering the university. From the suburbs where I was living, the media image of Roxbury was that it was a high-crime, dangerous place. From campus I would get there by the bus or the “T” and then the bus, a roundabout way it turned out.

One time, a student who had lived in Roxbury, took us a much shorter way, past a public housing project where he had grown up. We somewhat reluctantly followed our guide. When we debriefed, we all realized that we had a mental model, deep preconceptions, and misguided assumptions about the community we were working in.

The more I got involved in taking course work into the community, the more I understood that service-learning compelled institutional change. From the inside, we as faculty see the question as about us as individuals, teaching. Communities see [our arrival] as about the institution. Stepping out into the community can’t simply be done individually. It requires a larger institutional response. The deeper I got into service-learning the less my work was private. I was dealing with public issues.
I realized that to teach a course in American cultural history that includes community-based experience, as an essential part of the “primary” evidence to be analyzed and interpreted, is not simply a matter of redesigning the curriculum. It demands a conceptual shift that goes to the core of the profession. It challenges one’s view of pedagogy, epistemology, and the sacred tenet … the culture of objectivity.

In 1998, I took a leave from the university to join Campus Compact, a national coalition of 900 college and university presidents committed to the civic purposes of higher education. The transition from academia helped me to see academic culture in ways that I hadn’t seen so clearly before. I never quite appreciated the degree to which academics live in a world of their own. I never quite appreciated how we are socialized to be accountable only to ourselves. I was socialized to believe that my first loyalty was to my profession (a loyalty that was fairly undefined but meant something about my scholarship adhering to the standards of the craft) and after that there were no loyalties, not to institution, department, colleagues, or students. This deep socialization fostering the privatization of the faculty role led to inherent disengagement in social and political affairs.

My work at the Compact has public accountability. What I say reflects on Campus Compact. I have shifted to a more public role. I am much more conscious of an audience. I write not for a small group of academics but for as wide a group as possible.

There is also a shift in the realm of impact, from my home institution and a few students and the neighborhood, to working with colleagues around the country to try to shape the future, to build a democracy. If I talked about how to use education to build a democracy when I was on the faculty at Northeastern there would have been an empty room. I am now thinking and acting in much more political and public ways.
I’ve always been an observer, a people watcher. I’ve always been interested in dynamics between people. Since high school, I wanted to be a psychologist.

I came to the University of Minnesota to do a post-doc. Residents of the nearby Phillips Neighborhood were talking with the director of the university’s community clinic about working together on the lead-poisoning issue in their neighborhood. He was trying to draw resources from the university into the effort. I got involved because of my interests in neurotoxicology. That was my introduction to this community work. The researchers and community members met for the first time in April 1993. We have met monthly ever since. We changed our name and our focus a bit over the last several years, from the Phillips Neighborhood Lead Collaborative (PNLC), specifically focused on lead poisoning, to the Phillips Neighborhood Healthy Housing Collaborative (PNHHC), to convey broader interest in the home environment, children’s health, and the role of the home in causing wellness or illness.

I was the note taker in the beginning. I was still in training and I was used to taking notes. I didn’t know what else to do, or what my role was, so I appointed myself scribe. I recorded a lot of the early history of the collaborative. What I didn’t take many notes about, because I wasn’t conscious of it at the very beginning, was the process of evolving into a research partnership. I don’t think the community had ever said they wanted us to come do research, as they understood research. Somehow there was this process of educating each other, without consciously knowing that that was what we were doing.

The researchers would talk "researchy." The residents would say, “I don’t get that.” Susan Gust [a key neighborhood leader] was very good at insisting that we not use jargon: “We’re going to make you explain your acronyms, and define your terms.”

Through that process of being challenged about our own culture, the way we think and the way we talk, we imparted a lot of information about research, what it is good for, how you do it, and why it is impor-
tant to answer questions in a way that is rigorous, seeks “the truth,” and seeks knowledge that is objective. The residents came to understand research as a tool to assist them in answering their questions and as a basis for taking action.

We learned a lot from the residents as well. The neighborhood residents would be talking about sociopolitical issues and the researchers would be lost about neighborhood politics. We’d have to ask for explanations. So, there was an exchange. We got to understand the perspective of the community on a variety of issues and we learned about community organizing.

The questions we ended up asking in our research were generated together. The residents would talk about their own questions in their own terms, like “What is lead doing to our kids?” I viewed my job as a translator from community-speak into academic-speak. I helped the research team turn those questions into research questions around which we could write grant applications. I became the liaison between the academics and the community residents. That was my niche.

But creating that niche first required establishing trust. At first that was hard for all the researchers. Researchers and community residents were in different worlds. The university people did things in a certain way, had meetings in a certain way, expressed feelings in a certain way, spoke their own language, had their own academic time line. Researchers didn’t deal as much with process as with product. Susan has told me that she didn’t trust me early on. I was that psychologist type who sat back, didn’t say anything, observed, analyzed. She found that silence and privacy to be disrespectful. The fact that I made myself the scribe, because I didn’t know what else to do with myself, made her wonder about what I was recording. One of the most important things I learned from working with Susan and the other residents was about the meaning of trustworthiness and how to build trust. I took a long time to open up and share myself with people, but once I did I was able to demonstrate my respect for the resident members of the collaborative and my passion for the work. Slowly, I came to be more and more trusted.

I’ve learned things that I will carry with me forever. I have changed personally, but I also know that I will forever do my professional work differently because of this experience.
Occupational therapy includes in its core philosophy the idea that meaningful work has generative power [and] that people have the capacity to learn from experience. When this ability is combined with the cultivation of imagination and creativity, human beings can shape their environments to create healthy, balanced, and meaningful lives.

I found the themes implicit in the profession immensely compelling. Occupational therapy felt like a good way to make a difference in the world.

Professional problem solving uses a protocol: identify the problem, evaluate it, set goals for change, develop an intervention plan, implement it, and evaluate the results. Although most health professionals would acknowledge that successful outcomes depend on active engagement from the patient, professional approaches to problem solving still do not well equip people to change their own environments, or to work with others to develop capacity for collaborative public work. Citizenship was not on the screen. I eventually came to see that therapeutic relationships, though well intentioned and designed to help, carried with them hidden patterns of power, which limit people’s agency.

My colleagues from the College of St. Catherine’s psychology department and I did a research study to understand occupational therapists’ perceptions of the dynamics of helping. The most poignant finding was how many said they were disappointed by their inability to act on the values and motivations that brought them to the profession in the first place. They said they felt competent, but in a small arena. They’re good listeners. They’re intuitive. It’s part of the craft. But the same people who were really good at that could also feel completely incompetent in interacting with larger systems.
For me, it created a disconnection between the luminous philosophy and the actual day-to-day practice.

In the early 1990s, I was involved with an action-research project at Augustana Nursing Home, done in conjunction with Project Public Life at the Humphrey Institute at the University of Minnesota. It was focused on two questions:

- **Can therapeutic cultures become more public if staff and residents learn and apply basic political concepts and skills?**
- **Do public cultures encourage residents to shape their living environments?**

Through this experience, I had to learn to teach and apply the conceptual tools myself. The result was that I was able to think bigger, to get out of the box, and also to put into words with more clarity the earlier experiences and frustrations I had had.

The most important insight I came away with was that it is very difficult to make and sustain changes in therapeutic cultures if caregivers cannot expand their professional identities to include a public dimension.

The work I did in affiliation with Project Public Life brought me out of the therapeutic work into a larger public life. It gave me a language to name things I had felt from earlier experiences. It helped me to think more strategically and to deal with the hard work of change.
In the early 1970s, I was involved in a Ford Foundation teacher training project that connected novices to experienced teachers called the Ford Training and Placement Program. It used the University of Chicago as a place to share experiences.

The notion was that we would teach half a day with mentor teachers and the other half day we would meet with professors and talk about theory.

Being naïve and in my early twenties, I thought this was the way public education would go. Students would come out literate and critical thinkers. Teachers would be the transformers. The great names at the University of Chicago would talk to you.

I got my first job at a small elementary school in Woodlawn on the South Side. My epiphany was during storytelling hour. I was reading a story about a country mouse and a city mouse. I thought this was a dumb book but we were told to read this by the principal, and I was trying to make it dramatic.

A little kid started yelling, “Oh lord. That rat is going to eat up that cheese! That’s what them rats are always doing.”

I realized that these kids don’t want to hear about mice. They live among the rats. I thought, “Lord, I can do better than this.”

I got this little boy and hugged him, and told him that it’s going to be okay. He asked, “Did the rat get those people’s cheese?”

I thought, “I’m doing a disservice, all because of this stupid idea.”

Sallye McKee

Sallye McKee, associate vice provost for Urban and Educational Partnerships at the University of Minnesota, has been a major leader in civic engagement efforts at the university.
I discovered when I went into graduate school in education that with faculty the discipline is preeminent. There are a few who are multiperspective, but they are different. I never believed you should have only one perspective. I always believed you needed diverse perspectives.

Faculty, I found out, are not supposed to be in the world. It is even a bad thing to be in the world. You are supposed to describe the world.

I had thought that if you were in education it would be impossible not to engage the world. It was a people industry. In fairness, I think they saw themselves engaging the world, but on their own terms. There was not any value on understanding popular culture. I would say: How can you be in education and not understand popular culture? How can you work with African American children and not understand hip hop?

There were connections to schools but they were based on relationships that faculty needed, not what the community needed. I decided I would stay in higher education and work to connect it to community needs.
As an undergraduate at Swarthmore, I was oriented to my classes. I loved to write. I got lots of rewards from my teachers and peers about the writing I did.

Social science had me thinking about complex human issues that I wanted to figure out. I wanted to stay close to subjective human experience and observation. There were many rewards. People got jobs. They got tenure. They got to write books. They got to read theoretical materials. All of that was pretty thrilling. It opened worlds that I loved.

When the book by Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, about the decline of civic life in America came out in 1995 it caught the attention of some of us at UCSD. We called a meeting. There was a moment in the discussion where we said, “There’s been a decline of community. What can we do about it here?”

Then someone asked, “Is community declining in San Diego?”

We realized that none of us at the University of California at San Diego had a clue!

After a group of faculty decided that the University of California at San Diego should get more involved with the community, we said, “Before we lead the charge in renewing civic life we should know something about it.”

Mary Wolshak, vice provost for Outreach at UCSD, had an old car. She drove me around, talking a mile a minute. We met a leading Methodist minister in Mission Viejo. We met Stephanie Gout, director of the San Diego Organizing Project. We met the director of the San Diego Water Authority. I didn’t even know what a water authority did.
I had lived here since 1980, but my world was the campus. It was wonderful to walk into meetings and sit down with people who talked about their lives, their work, what role the university might play if we had a civic collaborative.

I had this sense, “God, there’s a big world out there.” It made me feel a little stupid because I’ve always been interested in the big world. I’ve written about it. I’ve felt connected to intellectual discussions about locality. But I learned pretty quickly how cloistered I had been.
I’m a boundary crosser and an integrator. Traditional disciplinary assessment doesn’t reward and sustain that. I had a strong identity as an adolescent intellectual. When I went to Yale, I majored in English literature in an interdisciplinary program. I was also a committed amateur actor, and wrote a newspaper column.

I went to Oxford on a Rhodes scholarship and studied social anthropology. Then I came back to Yale to attend graduate school in American Studies.

I saw myself as a teacher, a writer, and an intellectual.

I was regarded in graduate school as one of the people who was headed toward status. I was very successful. But in a primordial way I hate the structures of disciplinary assessment and status politics. I hate being judged like that, and I hate being put in the position of judging like that, although many people I know swim in those waters wonderfully, and do great things with it. It’s not that I feel it’s an evil world. It just doesn’t fit with my emotional landscape.

At my best it’s because I’m a boundary crosser and an integrator. Traditional disciplinary assessment doesn’t reward and sustain that. To take me at my worst it’s because I don’t want to be judged. You have to learn to live with continual status judgments. It’s just not the way I like to live.

At Michigan, the history department voted me tenure and American Studies didn’t. I had been slow getting my book finished, and the work didn’t fit their focus. It was a real crisis. I was furious. I felt like the guy on the old TV show “Branded.” I had to work through a sense of being rejected in the big moment of my career.
Right after I was denied tenure, I was nominated for a tenured research position in the history department at Northwestern University, thanks to some friends in the history department and others. This was the best possible thing in terms of a conventional narrative of a professional career.

But I realized I was being asked to organize my life around fealty to the profession, in which going out to another island in the archipelago of the professional landscape is more important than being in your community, than seeing your family every day. There’s a whole package deal you’re being asked to sign up for. It felt like surrender.

This was the Indiana-Jones moment of my life, the moment when I declared my independence from academic professionalism.

Scobey’s connection to the University of Michigan was up in the air after deciding not to apply for the position at Northwestern. But he eventually charted a new path, creating the Arts of Citizenship Program, which supports many university-community partnerships in public humanities work. It is a striking example of breaking down disciplinary walls, opening new pathways, and making changes in the larger world as a result.
In 1985, I had my liberal progressive critique of materialism and consumerism in American culture well in place. I saw my world, the therapists’ world, as the good guys. We were on the side of the angels.

I must have been open to some self-reflection. When I saw the review of *Habits of the Heart* by Robert Bellah and others in 1985, something told me it would be good for me to read it. I got the book to expand my critique of what was going on in American society, not to be challenged in my own work.

In one of the early chapters, the authors asked a therapist in California why she was committed to her children. She answered exactly the way I would have answered: “These are my values. I would feel guilty if I abandoned my children.” The interviewers probed more deeply. “Would she want others to hold similar values?” She said, “Everyone has to choose their own values. It’s not for me to impose values on others.”

My hair stood up as I read this passage. I sat in the chair transfixed. It was shocking that this therapist could not speak in terms of public morality. Tomorrow she could wake up with a revised set of values. The authors were not saying she’s an immoral person.

They acknowledged that she probably was as committed to her children as any of us. I don’t know that I would have been any more articulate about my own values as a parent if they had asked me. But I realized that I had bought into the discourse of private psychology.

I was never the same. I realized that I and my profession were part of the problem, not just part of the solution to our country’s social problems.

I recently heard a presentation by four senior family therapy scholars who were regretting that they had not made more of their careers, having been buried in day-to-day teaching and clinical administration and worrying that their research had not made a difference for practitioners. I was sitting in the same room feeling
fired up about my work, partly because I see myself as a catalyst and not as a Lone Ranger. Some of the difference is inborn temperament (I got the optimistic Irish genes, not the depressive ones), but some of it is working with a different paradigm. Citizenship work has transformed my career and renewed the sense of idealism that brought me to this field.

Communitarianism was a good model to start from in the 1980s, a both/and, private/public philosophy. I had discovered Amitai Etzioni and Alan Wolfe and other communitarian thinkers while writing my book *Soul Searching*.

A colleague and I discussed what a citizen therapist would actually do in the world.

We created “salons,” or Networker Forums outside Minnesota, in an effort to create a collective way for therapists to think about these issues. It turns out, in retrospect, that the reason people often joined these forum groups was that they were feeling frustrated about managed care.

They really were not into the community part of therapy. But these groups also tapped into the idealism of therapists who had entered the field in the sixties. At the initial organizing meetings, people talked in an agonized way, planning to change the world. They would say, “Then, I settled into private practice. I wanted to put my kids through college. I’m so exhausted at the end of the week I don’t have time to volunteer. And now managed care is boxing me in.”

I didn’t have the words for it, but I knew something was missing from how we were all thinking about ourselves as citizens and professionals. Communitarianism was a good beginning, but not a guide to action, at least for me.

I began to read about public work — professional practice that is politically energizing, catalytic, civically educative, and politically effective. It helped me develop a conceptual framework for action as a therapist. I had been giving talks to a variety of community groups about strengthening family life. The action breakthrough was in Wayzata, Minnesota, in April 1998. I talked with a large group of parents at a parent fair. The parents were lit up over the problem of feeling out of control of their time but afraid to get off the treadmill. A middle school principal said, “We’re part of this problem. We offer so many activities to kids that if parents agree to half of them, they’re not going to have much of a family life left.”

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That was the dawning for me that this issue of overscheduling was not just an individual family issue and a cultural issue. It was a structural issue as well. I talked to other people. Light bulbs started coming on for them and me both. Family time is a public issue.

A couple of months later, the organizer of the original parent fair asked me to come back next year and give that talk again. That was the moment that I decided to go for it. I turned her down. “I don’t want to give Doherty’s greatest hits. But if you want to take on this problem as a community, I’ve been learning a model to do this, and I’d be willing to come back and work with you to figure out how to do it.”

We organized a town meeting for the following spring.

About 70 people, including parents, school board people, and community leaders came. These people were ready. I began by asking, “Are these things we are talking about here — overscheduled kids and underconnected families — only individual family problems or are they also community problems? Are the solutions only individual family solutions, or are they also community solutions? What can we do about the problems as a community?”

It was an electrifying experience. When it was over, participants had decided to do something about the problem and, among other things, formed a community activation team. That group ultimately became the steering group for Family Life First.

Putting Family Life First became an organization that works to reclaim family life from a hyperactive consumer culture. It now has several affiliates, and has sparked a national conversation and debate about family overscheduling.
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THE UNIVERSITY AS AN OPEN-AIR MARKET

In higher education, students have long heard stories of oppression and injustice. But they have learned much less about organizing skills that teach effective action. The result is moral passion, but political powerlessness. Students see the growing public poverty, what the economist John Kenneth Galbraith once termed “public squalor” in the midst of private affluence. But they have little sense of what to do about it.

Conventional citizen activism on both local and national levels has addressed itself to issues. But activists do not often ask what their work “means” in a larger sense, where they are going in the longer run, how their particular efforts might contribute to the commonwealth of the nation, or what their opponents might have to contribute to understanding and solving public problems. This is a failure of our larger public imagination, for which higher education bears some significant responsibility. Yet as the narratives in Going Public dramatize — and as developments in mainstream disciplines and interdisciplinary bodies intimate — there is a gathering revolution in theories of knowledge production and scholarship from within the center of the enterprise.

Public engagement, increasingly, is seen not as an aside or secondary form of research, but rather as a wellspring of intellectual discovery.

The question that Ken Keller asks about science — if one assumes the “linear axis” of applied- to basic-research, where are you going to put Louis Pasteur? — is increasingly animating discussion in fields such as political science and sociology, or research groups such as the Social Science Research Council. The framing chapters of the 2000 edition of Blackwell’s Companion to Social Theory, a collection of essays by leading scholars, read as a sustained attack on the impoverishment of detached research.

“Going public” means answering the call of a turbulent world in urgent need of wisdom, not simply more information and more knowledge.
The potential for excellence through public scholarship is increasingly understood. There is, simultaneously, a growing sense that a vital public culture of exchange, debate, different voices, and different ideas is the mark of community flourishing in the changing environment of the twenty-first century. Such a culture will require much more porous, open borders between academic life and the larger society, a spirit of “publicness” that permeates inside, outside, and across the boundaries.

Susan Gust, a community leader in the low-income Phillips neighborhood in Minneapolis, sees the university of the future as an open-air market. She says, “I always tell university folks to deal with their seams,” the border between the university and the world. “Hire across that line, find out all the small businesses and restaurants that are right around that line, and make them your vendors. Make sure that seam is physically accessible, so that people from the university can cross it and people from the surrounding community can participate in this public place. Come to our meetings. Participate as citizens with us.”

Knowledge needs to be guided by wisdom — broader frameworks, concepts, and values that integrate information and the knowledge of how to use it, that contextualize, prioritize, and guide action. In whatever form they take, we need new images and ways of thinking about higher education as open, public places. The men and women who recount their stories in Going Public — challenging conventional notions of scholarship and teaching, recognizing the social nature of knowledge, and welcoming changes in their own roles — offer resources.

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