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Community-Engaged Learning in Graduate Education

A Review and Call to Action

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Community-Engaged Learning in Graduate Education

A Review and Call to Action

Michael Rios and Sally Neas

Abstract

A thematic analysis of articles published between 2005 and 2023 was conducted to assess the state of community-engaged learning (CEL) in graduate education. The analysis reveals specific foci at different levels of analysis ranging from individuals to institutions. This includes attention to student learning outcomes, pedagogical practices, community partner involvement, student autoethnographies, program development and evaluation, and institutional factors. A praxis agenda for scholarship is proposed in response to trends in graduate education and gaps in the current literature. This includes further integration of CEL into Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics, and Medicine (STEMM) graduate education, broadening theoretical and methodological repertoires, and further supporting graduate students as engaged scholars and teachers.

Keywords: *Community engagement, graduate education, professional development, research review*

Aprendizaje comprometido con la comunidad en la educación de posgrado

Una revisión y un llamado a la acción

Michael Ríos y Sally Neas

Resumen

Se realizó un análisis temático de artículos publicados entre 2005 y 2023 para evaluar el estado del aprendizaje basado en vinculación comunitaria (CEL) en la educación a nivel de posgrado. El análisis revela focos específicos en diferentes niveles de análisis que van desde los individuos hasta las instituciones. Esto incluye analizar los resultados de aprendizaje de los estudiantes, las prácticas pedagógicas, el involucramiento de los socios comunitarios, las autoetnografías de los estudiantes, el desarrollo y evaluación de programas y factores institucionales. Debido a la brecha existente en la literatura actual, se propone una agenda de prácticas académicas en respuesta a las tendencias en la educación a nivel de posgrado. Esto incluye una mayor integración de (CEL) en la educación a nivel de posgrado en Ciencia, Tecnología, Ingeniería, Matemáticas y Medicina (STEMM), ampliando los repertorios teóricos y metodológicos actuales y apoyando aún más a los estudiantes de posgrado como académicos y docentes comprometidos con la comunidad.

Palabras clave: *Participación comunitaria, educación de posgrado, desarrollo profesional, revisión de investigaciones*

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In their 2006 seminal article “Preparing future faculty for community engagement: Barriers, facilitators, models, and recommendations,” Kerry Ann O’Meara and Audrey Jaeger reviewed the state of graduate education and advocated for further integration of community engagement into graduate programs. Barriers to community engagement in U.S. graduate education identified by O’Meara and Jaeger close to twenty years ago continue to be lowered. A focus on interdisciplinary programs, the number of dissertations that integrate community engagement, and a growing ecosystem of institutional supports show promising results (Morin et al., 2016).

Progress is being made with respect to more robust training for graduate students, especially programs that span across disciplines and fields. In addition to early adoption of programs at Michigan State

University and the University of Georgia (Doberneck et al., 2017; Matthews et al., 2015), interdisciplinary certificate programs, fellowships, and courses have been implemented in public universities (e.g., the University of California, Davis, University of Michigan, and University of Minnesota), as well as private institutions such as Brown University, Cornell University, and the University of Pennsylvania. A key focus of many of these efforts is preparing students as public scholars irrespective of disciplinary affiliation. Beyond the integration of related theories and methodologies, students are being exposed to engaged scholarship journals as well as being made aware of how to successfully navigate institutional recognition and reward structures. This is in addition to a growing ecosystem of national organizations that provide professional development and ongoing support for graduate students, practitioner scholars, and faculty, alike. Yet, there is more work to be done.

An important question remains whether U.S. institutions of higher education are adequately preparing graduate students—in whole or in part, and at what levels of intervention—to meet today’s problems and tomorrow’s challenges. In considering the development of community-engaged graduate education over the past several decades, a review of literature is an effective strategy to highlight which topics have been discussed and to identify the gaps that may remain. Such a review can determine whether the scholarship on graduate education is in line with trends in the preparation of future engaged scholars and serves to identify a research agenda that aims toward greater integration of community engagement into graduate programs.

This article therefore comprises a review and thematic analysis of community-engaged learning (CEL) in graduate education in the United States. We define CEL as pedagogy that connects community issues with course content. It is often done in collaboration with a community partner and may include ongoing and documented reflection. Although there are many similarities to CEL in graduate and undergraduate education, we explore distinctions between the two. Methods of the literature search and review are summarized, followed by an analysis that identified themes in 57 articles within the engaged scholarship literature. After identifying gaps in the literature, the article concludes with a call for research that situates graduate student learning in the context of, and in response to, trends in graduate education.

Methods

Literature Search and Review

To conduct a systematic review, we located relevant peer-reviewed journal articles through the following process. The search was limited to interdisciplinary journals that explicitly focused on community-engaged research and/or learning, excluding monographs and disciplinary journals. Journals were excluded if they were not available via EBSCO Information Services (EBSCO) nor individual journal search tools. We used keyword searches within eleven engaged scholarship journals (see Table 1). This narrow focus on interdisciplinary journals enabled us to target empirical studies in the peer-reviewed engaged scholarship literature. Each journal was searched using the EBSCO database, except for journals that were not available through EBSCO. In those cases, we used the search tool provided on the online edition of the journal. We used Boolean searches with the following search terms: “graduate education” or “graduate students” or “doctoral students” or “masters students,” excluding all equivalent phrases. All journals were searched in January of 2022, and then searched again in September 2023 to identify newly published articles. There was no restriction on publication date.

Once articles were identified in each journal, we read the abstracts to decide their relevance. To be included, journal articles had to provide results relevant to CEL involving graduate students and/or within graduate student education. Based on these criteria, over 200 initially identified articles were excluded. For instance, many were excluded because although they mentioned the terms “graduate” and “students,” they focused on CEL education for undergraduate students. Articles were also excluded because they addressed graduate students or graduate education but not specifically CEL for that group (e.g., a case study of an undergraduate CEL class that was taught by a graduate student). In some instances, it was not clear from abstracts whether an article met the inclusion criteria, in which case we read each article, conferred and

made a collaborative decision to include or exclude an article. For example, on further analysis several articles were excluded when they focused on CEL vis-à-vis a specific field or discipline.

Table 1.

Journals and Databases Included in the Systematic Search and Results from the Search of Each Journal

Journal	Database used	Initial articles located	Excluded	Total included in analysis
<i>Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement</i>	EBSCOhost	58	32	26
<i>Journal of Community Engagement and Higher Education</i>	EBSCOhost	39	29	9
<i>Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning</i>	EBSCOhost	18	9	8
<i>Collaborations: A Journal of Community-Based Research and Practice</i>	Searched through website (not available through EBSCOhost)	34	29	5
<i>Engaged Scholar Journal: Community-Engaged Research, Teaching, and Learning</i>	Searched through website (not available through EBSCOhost)	76	72	4
<i>Journal of Community Practice</i>	Taylor & Francis (not available through EBSCOhost)	8	6	2
<i>Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship</i>	EBSCOhost	29	27	2
<i>Journal of Service-Learning in Higher Education</i>	Searched through website (not available through EBSCOhost)	9	8	1
<i>Gateways: International Journal of Community Research and Engagement</i>	EBSCOhost	8	8	0
<i>International Journal of Research on Service-Learning and Community Engagement</i>	Searched through website (not available through EBSCOhost)	1	1	0
	Total initially identified	278	Total reviewed	57

A total of 278 articles were initially identified (see Table 1). Of these, 221 were excluded, leaving a total of 57 articles that addressed CEL in graduate education between 2005 and 2023. There was no restriction on publication date. A 2005 article represents the earliest these terms were found in these journals. The *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement* contributed the most articles to the literature on CEL in graduate education, representing slightly more than 45% of the reviewed articles.

Thematic Analysis

We used a thematic analysis process to identify and develop themes represented within the findings of the literature (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2022). To do this, we first read all articles in-depth. While reading, we took notes in a matrix about the research methods, community-engaged elements in the study, and key findings. From there, we developed codes through an open, inductive coding process (Saldaña, 2016). To do this, we reread the key findings in the matrix for each article and grouped these findings into categories. These categories focused on themes within the articles' findings and became the parent codes we used (see Table 2). We then separated the articles into these categories and reread key findings in the matrix to identify subthemes, which became child codes. Finally, we did a second round of deductive coding (Saldaña, 2016) where we reread matrix notes about each article and confirmed child codes with the appropriate themes. We applied codes to all articles, with several articles coded in more than one theme. For example, a number of articles that focused on “program development and evaluation” were also coded for “learning outcomes,” as they discussed program design and outcomes of these programs. We referenced the original article when necessary. When uncertain as to whether a code should be applied, we conferred and made a collaborative decision.

Thematic foci were organized to determine levels of analysis in which graduate education scholarship is clustered.¹ Levels of analysis refer to the focus of research and scale in terms of magnitude and complexity (Tight, 2012, p. 274). Accordingly, this begins with individual student experiences and their course/group learning environments, to attention to the communities students engage in, and the institutional settings of graduate education.

Table 2.

Parent and Child Codes Applied to Journal Articles

Parent codes	Child codes
Student learning outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Enhanced course content – Student development as CE scholars – Student reflection on power and privilege – Personal development – Benefits to career
Pedagogical practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Importance of student self-reflection – Challenges of CEL pedagogies – Students connecting theory and practice
Program development and evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Community partnership development – Assessment – Recommended practices
Community partner involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Positive outcomes for community partners – Challenges or limitations of community partners
Student autoethnographies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Positionality – Challenges and tensions of being a graduate student
Institutional factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Interdisciplinarity – Increase use of community engagement – Institutional challenges – Trends in graduate education

The 57 articles included in this review fit in one or more of the six themes for a total of 80 themes counted. Categorizing the themes by level of analysis (Table 3), the results yielded articles that primarily address individual and course/group levels of engagement, with 43% and 40%, respectively, which mirrors

¹ The authors draw from Tight (2012) to identify levels of analysis in the engaged scholarship literature on graduate education. However, the authors introduce “community” as a level of analysis given the absence of the engaged scholarship literature in Tight’s review of higher education literature.

this emphasis in undergraduate service-learning. This is followed by 11% of the articles that focus on the community level. Receiving slightly less attention are 6% of the articles that address the institution level. Most of the articles included used a case study approach to assess the outcomes of individual programs and courses, often reflecting on challenges associated with CEL experiences as well as recommendations that responded to challenges. Overwhelmingly, case study articles centered on locally based CEL experiences, with only seven articles addressing a global or global/local focus.

Table 3.

Themes Identified in the Literature, Including Level of Analysis, Definitions, and the Number of Times the Theme Appeared

Community-Engaged Learning Themes	Level of Analysis	Definition	Count
Student learning outcomes	Individual	Outcomes and benefits for graduate students	25
Pedagogical practices	Course/group	Teaching and advising practices	21
Program development and evaluation	Course/group	Development and evaluation of programs that support graduate students	11
Community partner involvement	Community	Outcomes and experiences of community partners who engage with graduate students; also includes best practices for working with community partners	9
Student autoethnographies	Individual	Research and reflections written by graduate students about their learning experiences	9
Institutional factors	Institution	Institutional-level norms, practices and trends related to graduate education	5

Results

From this analysis, six distinct themes were identified in the scholarship on CEL in graduate education, as shown in Table 2. In the order of decreasing frequency, these themes include student learning outcomes, pedagogical practices, program development and evaluation, community partner involvement, student autoethnographies, and institutional factors. The following sections further describe each of these themes beginning with a focus on individual student experiences followed by course/group, institutional, and community foci.

Level of Analysis: Individual

Student Learning Outcomes

A third of all themes identified in this literature review focused on the benefits of CEL experiences for graduate students. Themes identified in these articles are the ways that community engagement enhances learning and career trajectories, prepares graduate students as engaged scholars later in life, helps students reflect on issues of power and privilege, and supports their personal development.

The studies reviewed prominently focused on how CEL experiences enhance graduate education overall, often by offering students the opportunity to apply disciplinary skills. This was found, for instance, in an MBA program (Arantes do Amaral, 2018), an expressive arts therapy class (Boston et al., 2017), and two different social work classes (Nikzad-Terhune & Taylor, 2020; Taylor et al., 2015). Community

engagement also enhanced graduate learning by changing student perspectives. For example, through an international program, students came to value localized knowledge and viewed learning as interconnected and relational rather than separated from real-world contexts (Areesophonpichet et al., 2020). These experiences also helped graduate students develop interpersonal skills. For example, a class on grief helped students build interpersonal skills through the integration of emotionally difficult content (Wheat et al., 2019).

Several articles focused on how CEL experiences benefit graduate students' careers through the acquisition of practical and professional skills. This was especially evident in studies of professional programs where the connection between learning and application was part of practicum-based graduate training. For example, a case study of physical therapy students showed a desire to change their practice to participate in global outreach programs after being exposed to different cultural backgrounds as part of engaged learning experiences (Drnach et al., 2016). For psychotherapy students, engaged learning gave them further skills with expressive arts therapy (Boston et al., 2017). This was also found in traditional doctoral programs, where graduate students gained consulting skills (Gunaratna et al., 2006; Nelson et al., 2022) and new teaching skills (Matthews et al., 2022), including how to integrate engaged learning into their future teaching careers (Garrison & Jaeger, 2014). There was also evidence from the literature that CEL can change career trajectories. For graduate students who participated in the K-12 STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) outreach program, the experience shaped their career choices by either confirming them or offering new directions (Laursen et al., 2012). Other studies found that students also developed beneficial professional connections through CEL experiences (Gunaratna et al., 2006; Wickam, 2018).

Often, the systemic and intractable nature of social problems that students learn through coursework can discourage students from trying to address these problems. Several case studies drew attention to the value of graduate-level CEL in addressing this challenge. For example, Moser et al. (2023) described the experiences of a graduate public administration course focused on affordable housing and gentrification that empowered students to work on such intractable problems in the future. The review provided evidence that CEL experiences facilitate reflection on issues of power and privilege, which may support graduate students to develop critical perspectives. Thurber and Suiter (2019) noted that this is one of the important ways CEL develops students as community-engaged scholars. For example, in their community development course, students were initially more comfortable working with service provision organizations that tended to be professionalized. However, through coaching from the instructors, students gained familiarity and comfort with grassroots organizations and social movement work. Mao et al. (2016) demonstrated how support from instructors helps students gain critical perspectives through uncomfortable experiences that may arise in CEL environments. Other articles highlighted how CEL experiences facilitate reflection on one's role in serving underserved populations and gaining skills to do so (Drnach et al., 2016), including developing cultural competence (Keeler et al., 2022). Another outcome for graduate students that is also reflected in undergraduate CEL is personal development, more broadly. Several articles discussed how students gained self-confidence and efficacy (Matthews et al., 2022; Wheat et al., 2019) and developed stronger relationships in their community (Keller et al., 2022; Matthews et al., 2022; Thurber & Suiter, 2019). Other articles provided evidence that direct service to communities increased student motivations to meaningful work (Arantes do Amaral, 2018; Gendron et al., 2013). Other case studies showed that students gained self-awareness and developed multicultural and multidisciplinary fluency through the acquisition of professional skills in CEL programs (Coffield et al., 2021).

Although academic, personal, and professional learning outcomes are a commonly found feature from undergraduate CEL studies, one area that makes CEL in graduate education distinctive from undergraduate education is how CEL enhances graduate students' careers by supporting their development as community-engaged scholars and practitioners. By incorporating CEL into coursework, graduate students learned methodologies and frameworks that changed their approach to research (Arantes do Amaral, 2018; Lercari et al., 2018), as well as gained comfort with and knowledge of interdisciplinary scholarship (Keller et al., 2022; Nelson et al., 2022). Several articles focused on the importance of understanding community needs,

as well as connecting disciplinary knowledge to societal benefit (Drnach et al., 2016; Gunaratna et al., 2006; Nikzad-Terhune & Taylor, 2020; Taylor et al., 2015). Incorporating community engagement into professional skills development may support graduate students to incorporate engagement into their future careers (Drnach et al., 2016; Nikzad-Terhune & Taylor, 2020; Taylor et al., 2015).

Student Autoethnographies

Personal experiences, represented in the form of autoethnographies, provide insights into the CEL experiences in students that are infrequently achieved with undergraduate students. These accounts document the first-hand perspectives and experiences of graduate students, representing nine of the 57 articles identified in this review. Several of these articles draw from the self-reflection of individuals involved in programs and courses, whether as participants or instructors. For example, Hubrig et al. (2017) shared their experiences leading a community partnership program to help graduate students understand and navigate community and university dynamics when planning partnership programs. Self-reflection is also important for graduate students in examining their own positionality and privilege, especially when working internationally, and in understanding how students might engage communities in ways that are mutually beneficial (Darling et al., 2014). Reflection may also help graduate students discover the qualities of community-engaged research, such as trust, indeterminacy, and emotional investments (Ingman, 2016). Several cases illustrated how graduate students can be successful in conducting their individual research while also addressing the challenges and tensions of doing engaged scholarship as a graduate student (Cloutier et al., 2022; Del Nero, 2017; Ewan, 2019; Hubrig et al., 2017). Other scholars documented the barriers to accessing networks of support for their scholarship (Kniffin et al., 2021a) and the challenges associated with limited resources and time as graduate students (Cloutier et al., 2022). Relatedly, Cloutier et al. (2022) provided recommendations to address these challenges, such as additional training, financial support for projects, and support from faculty mentors. Other authors noted challenges that particularly impact the participation of graduate students of color and other marginalized identities. For example, Del Nero (2017) wrote about how he and other graduate students internalized the norms of their institutions and disciplines that marginalize community voice, especially for communities of color; he further observed that graduate students are particularly poised to interrupt this cycle, and many are doing so. In another autoethnography, individual students addressed this alienation through theories and methodologies and reported combating marginalization using feminist principles and transparent collaborative processes during data analysis (Ewan, 2019).

Level of Analysis: Course/Group

Pedagogical Practices

The second most prominent theme after student learning outcomes from our review focused on pedagogical practices. Here, scholars reflect on their pedagogy and speak to the specific challenges of teaching and advising, as well as on strategies to enhance graduate student experiences. One of the challenges identified by several authors is the interdisciplinary nature of CEL, which presents a challenge vis-à-vis the disciplinary focus of many graduate programs (Goodhue, 2017; Stocking & Cuthforth, 2006). Goodhue (2017) thus suggested positioning CEL training for graduate students as cross-disciplinary and complementary to disciplinary training. By contrast, Stocking and Cuthforth (2006) argued the importance of finding a disciplinary connection. On a more practical level, and similar to CEL in undergraduate education, another challenge is that timing and pacing between university schedules and community partners can sometimes misalign; graduate coursework is often confined to a specific timeline, with a clear end date, which may not be practical for a community partner (Levkoe et al., 2019). In addition, several articles noted that funding for graduate student CEL projects can be hard to come by (Levkoe et al., 2019; Mattson et al., 2013). Finding the right partnership can also be challenging when teaching community engagement. To address this challenge, Stocking and Cuthforth (2006) suggested fostering long-term

partnerships that instructors can continue to work with over several courses, which is a similar approach to undergraduate coursework.

Another focus of pedagogically oriented articles in this review includes strategies that address teaching challenges, such as the integration of theory and practice, teaching practical skills, the importance of intentional self-reflection, and providing individualized support from instructors. Several scholars report integrating theory through its application in course practicums. For example, Wheat et al. (2019) used theories of grief to help students make meaning of their community-engaged experiences as part of an outreach course working with grieving K-12 students. In a class supporting a food movement, graduate students' engagement was supported by how they could apply theoretical knowledge in discussions and work with their community partner (Levkoe et al., 2019). Elliott and Driscoll (2021) documented how using various engagement methods iteratively throughout the course enabled graduate students to integrate theory with community input, resulting in a successful collaborative design project.

The literature reviewed here suggested that a focus on practical skills (often missing in graduate education, especially non-professional degrees) led to positive student feedback, as evidenced in a class where graduate students found the most useful content was the acquisition of practical skills, such as learning to evaluate plans, set objectives, how to work with stakeholders, and give effective presentations (Latimore et al., 2014). Practical skills are also imparted by learning from community-engagement practitioners. Ager (2005) described how instructors integrate community-based knowledge through guest speakers and field trips.

Creating time and space for intentional self-reflection is another important strategy for CEL in graduate education. As documented in much of the literature on undergraduate student learning, reflection is also a key to a graduate student's learning in a course (Hammond et al., 2005; Levkoe et al., 2019; Mao et al., 2016). For graduate students, this may include being paired with a community partner to conduct research. For example, Armitage and Levac (2015) observed that self-reflection ensured students were mindful of, and could help mitigate, issues of power differentials that existed between themselves and a community partner.

A final strategy identified in the reviewed articles affirms the importance of support from instructors and staff advising. This may come as individualized coaching, as described by Levkoe et al. (2019), where the instructor worked individually with students to reflect on the relationship between learning and action, leading to more critical and justice-oriented approaches. Such support can also be pivotal in helping international students overcome linguistic and cultural barriers to make sense of their CEL experiences (Mao et al., 2016). Jaeger et al. (2011) also found that advisor-advisee relationships were key to supporting graduate student engaged scholarship. In particular, advisors often drew from their own CEL experiences, engaged in co-learning with graduate students, and served as arbiters and advocates for their advisees to different departments that didn't value or understand this form of scholarship.

Program Development and Evaluation

Close to a dozen articles in our review focused on successful programs. Themes addressed in these articles include developing community partnerships, program assessment, and more general recommendations on program development and implementation, in many ways mirroring the literature from undergraduate CEL. Several of these articles focus on how to form generative and mutually beneficial partnerships in designing programs or ongoing engaged learning experiences (Chupp & Joseph, 2010; Curwood et al., 2011; Morrell et al., 2015; Velten, 2016). In reviewing the outcomes of graduate CEL experiences, Chupp and Joseph (2010) pointed out that programs tend to emphasize benefits to students and/or the university without regard to community benefit. Using a case study of a pilot project in social work, they recommended integrating "structured critical reflection," wherein students reflect on their praxis to better serve community partners (p. 204), as well as department and institutional supports such as funding and seeking alignment between community and university needs. Several articles focused on interdisciplinary CEL programs that addressed topics such as food insecurity, aging and social isolation, and global

engagement, with implications for how this work is coordinated across academic units (Kun et al., 2010; Lavery et al., 2023; Taylor et al., 2015, 2018). One of the articles emphasized the importance of assessing departmental and institutional readiness in partnerships (Curwood et al., 2011), whereas another discussed a program's intentional location in between the university and the community as a way of disrupting institutional norms that bifurcate university and community relations (Hill et al., 2019).

Articles in this thematic category also addressed the programmatic evaluation of graduate CEL. For example, Goodhue (2017) employed a values-engaged approach developed by Imagining America's working group on assessment, which sought to challenge a neoliberal focus on outcomes by equally emphasizing CEL processes (Goodhue, 2017). Other articles identified professional development skills in community engagement. Doberneck et al. (2017) described a competency-based approach to professional development regardless of whether individual students at Michigan State University aspired to being faculty, community-engagement practitioners, or extension educators. The authors provided a list of twenty competencies required for their graduate certificate in engagement, ranging from theoretical understandings to skills and abilities that support ethical and effective scholarship.

Level of Analysis: Institutional

Institutional Factors

While several of the articles reviewed above situate CEL programs in an institutional context and identify the challenges therein, a handful of reviewed articles focused on institutional-level factors that shape the graduate student experience as well as promising trends that support CEL. The most foundational of these articles comes from O'Meara and Jaeger (2006), which laid out the historical and contemporary context around graduate preparation and assessed current barriers and facilitators of graduate-level engaged learning. When they conducted their review in the early 2000s, their point of departure included identifying ways the historical model of the public research university failed to prepare graduate students for community engagement. In the United States, this includes early development of Ph.D. programs as highly specialized, a focus on individually produced research, and a prioritization of basic and science-based research over applied research, professional, and liberal arts curricula. They also identified barriers that permeate today about reward structures, that is, research and external funding, and inconsistent messaging about what is valued, funding, and the way academia continues to reproduce itself. In response, O'Meara and Jaeger also pointed out trends furthering CEL, including the growth of new programs and initiatives to support graduate education in community engagement, disciplinary associations beginning to emphasize and support community engagement, and offices of community engagement and service-learning. Ten years later, the authors published a reflection on advances in CEL graduate education (Morin et al., 2016) and noted progress through the advancement of interdisciplinary research, funding that considers broader impacts, and the increase of training and support.

Jaeger et al. (2014) also found evidence of progress for CEL in graduate education through increases in dissertations that included community engagement. They observed that many of these dissertations came from institutions that explicitly valued and supported community-engaged scholarship, reflected in institutional recognitions, such as the Carnegie Community Engagement Elective Classification or the President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll. Many also came from land-grant universities, with the majority within the fields of public health and education. In addition to documenting positive advancements in graduate-level CEL, Sandmann et al. (2016) put forth a model to promote systemic change within institutions to better support CEL. Their model called for improvements across departments, disciplinary associations, and graduate education. Although focused on system-wide change and not just graduate education, their article highlighted the need for better support for CEL from university administrators, as well as the importance of graduate education as both a part and beneficiary of such efforts.

One of the articles in this review provided an analysis of two programs at public land-grant, research-intensive universities to identify ways that institutions can support community engagement in graduate education. In comparing the Michigan State program with a similar one at the University of Georgia,

Matthews et al. (2015) recommended building on what already works at an institution, starting small and growing the program over time, identifying and involving key supporters from the beginning, learning from other programs and reviewing program-related literature, clarifying student expectations, building in flexibility, employing principles of engagement, and celebrating graduate student success (pp. 177–179). Such programs at these and other land-grant universities were mentioned by O’Meara and Jaeger (2006) as vital to integrating community engagement into graduate education, especially those that include offices of outreach, engagement, and service-learning.

Level of Analysis: Community

Community Partner Outcomes

Nine of the articles reviewed explicitly focused on community partner outcomes and experiences vis-à-vis graduate students. Themes identified include the general benefit to community partners, frameworks and considerations for developing mutually beneficial projects, and common challenges encountered in working with community partners. Generally, as with undergraduate CEL, these articles documented benefits to community partners, including enhancement of partner organization legitimacy and power through an emphasis on community voice and control. For example, Thurber and Suiter (2019) found the ability of a community partner to tell their community’s story, co-learning, and an enhanced relationship with their university as the main outcomes. However, they also pointed out the inconsistency of student work and communication as some challenges voiced by community scholars. Other articles noted that graduate CEL can also lead to significant material gains for community partners, such as the acquisition of goods, communication materials and marketing campaigns, and events (Arantes do Amaral, 2018).

Reviewed articles also identified ways to structure mutually beneficial projects, though again, often in ways that mirror findings from broader and undergraduate-only CEL studies. For example, Amerson et al. (2021) proposed “fair trade learning” as a framework for designing and evaluating engaged learning to serve the needs of a community (Amerson et al., 2021). Findings from their community partner survey identified a long-term vision for the partnership, communication to community members about the partnership, and the utilization of community resources as strengths. Similarly, Bain (2018) framed their evaluation of community partnership outcomes from a decolonial perspective using “Four Rs”—relevance, risk-taking, respect, and relationship-building—to enhance community partner benefit. The author pointed out that such considerations are particularly important when working with communities that have a history of being exploited by academics. Chupp and Joseph (2010) evaluated the outcomes of CEL from the perspective of individual graduate students, the university, and community, making the case that CEL should focus on social change, which requires universities to engage in authentic, long-term partnerships. They identified priority outcomes for community, including increased organizational capacity, knowledge, and community networks; access and input to university decision-making; ability to manage and sustain revitalization investments; and quality of life improvement for community residents (p. 208). These aspirational outcomes lay bare some of the challenges in achieving successful community partner outcomes in graduate CEL. Similar to the experience of community partners involved in undergraduate learning, key issues include organizational capacity, significant logistical and coordination issues such as the constraints of the academic year and misalignment with community needs, and difficulties in communication (Armitage & Levac, 2015; Barbierri et al., 2021; Gendron et al., 2013). As Thurber and Suiter highlight (2019), this can create tensions with community partners, as do power dynamics that exist between universities and communities, which can constrain partnerships, regardless of whether the experience is a graduate or undergraduate course.

Discussion

This review article focused on CEL in graduate education in the United States to identify major themes. As noted previously, this literature review was confined to peer-reviewed articles in interdisciplinary engaged

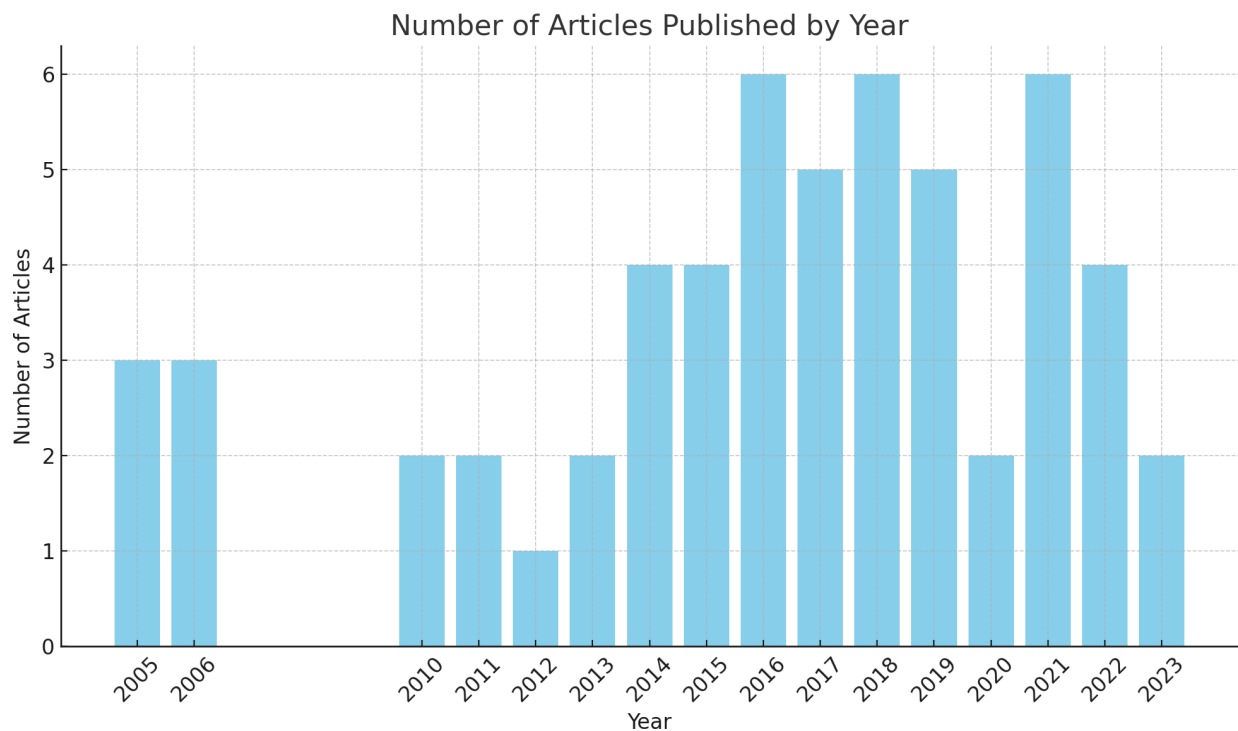
scholarship journals and as such may not reflect the entirety of the field. Monographs and edited volumes about CEL in graduate education fell outside of the study as did more general higher education and discipline-specific journals, organization and association guides and reports (see, for instance, American Council of Learned Societies, 2024; Gilvin et al., 2012; Post et al., 2016). Furthermore, we only searched for journals in English, and most of the journal articles identified were written by scholars from universities in the United States and Canada.

In considering the findings from the review of literature, as demonstrated above, most of the studies focused on the outcomes of CEL for graduate students, as well as teaching/advising practices; this focus seems to mirror that of the CEL literature for undergraduates, as well. Less common in our review were articles describing the development or assessment of graduate programs, graduate student autoethnographies, or articles focused on community-partner or institutional-level outcomes and practices. The distribution of focus also is mirrored in who helped create these studies. Of the 57 articles, over 50% were written by faculty, close to 30% were written by a combination of faculty and graduate students, and under 20% by graduate students. In only a few instances were articles authored or co-authored by community-engagement professionals or community partners.

In addition, articles in this review were primarily (42 of the 57) published between 2014 and 2022 (see Figure 1). In considering the themes of these articles, student autoethnographies represent the most recent focus, as they began appearing in 2014. The COVID-19 pandemic may have had a negative impact on the output of the number of articles overall as evidenced by fewer articles being published in 2020.

Figure 1.

Graduate Education Journal Articles Published between 2005 and 2023



The general focus of many of the themes analyzed in this review suggests there are specific areas of graduate CEL meriting further attention. While not a new call, strategic direction to advance CEL in

graduate education as part of institutional transformation (Chupp & Joseph, 2010) is still needed. Specifically, a praxis research agenda in response to trends in higher education and current gaps in scholarship is appropriate. Here, we define a praxis research agenda as one that reflects on the body of CEL scholarship with the aim of actively producing knowledge that informs and shapes graduate education. This is important as CEL in graduate education takes on a more interdisciplinary character and as part of an expanding public scholarship ecosystem within and across institutions of higher education in the U.S. and internationally (O'Meara & Jaeger, 2006; Morin et al., 2016). Specific foci within a graduate education praxis research agenda for CEL include integrating community engagement within the Science, Technology, Mathematics, and Medicine (STEMM) fields; the application of diverse theories and methodologies to advance CEL in graduate education as a byproduct of its greater interdisciplinarity; and the identification and evaluation of long-term, institution-wide mechanisms to train the next generation of engaged scholars across a range of disciplinary fields.

Integrating Community Engagement into STEMM Graduate Education

Community-engaged research and training in graduate education historically grew out of the social sciences and humanities, with disciplinary perspectives coming from fields, such as public health, social work, education, counseling, and psychology. This is in alignment with Jaeger et al.'s (2014) research on community-engaged dissertations, which found that over half were emanating from public health or education. Of the 57 articles identified, only six were grounded in STEMM, and those often reflected challenges rather than only positive outcomes. This is not surprising given that CEL is still not part of disciplinary norms within many STEMM fields, as reflected in the studies from Del Nero (2017) in biomedicine and Reddick et al. (2018) in engineering. This is despite significant research documenting that community engagement can enhance graduate students' career opportunities in many fields (Boston et al., 2017; Drnach et al., 2016; Garrison & Jaeger, 2014; Gunaratna et al., 2006; Laursen et al., 2012).

The field of citizen science is one promising direction for integrating CEL into STEMM fields, where a great deal of work is being done to encourage public participation in science, not only in the collection and analysis of data but also in the generation of research questions through mutually beneficial collaborations (Phillips et al., 2019). Nationally, organizations and initiatives such as SENCER (Science Education for New Civic Engagements and Responsibilities, sencer.net) also reflect these opportunities. The articles reviewed here also offer examples of what this could look like. For example, Latimore et al. (2014) described a program to improve community-engagement skills among natural resources graduate students, and Laursen et al. (2012) discussed a K-12 science outreach program for graduate students. Coffield et al. (2021) provided an exemplary case study where STEMM doctoral students were involved in a leadership training program to learn professional skills in communication, engagement, interdisciplinary teamwork, and leadership. More research is needed to identify the benefits, challenges, and best practices of community-engagement integration within STEMM graduate education.

Broadening Theoretical and Methodological Repertoires through Interdisciplinarity

One expected outgrowth of increasing interdisciplinarity is the introduction of novel theories and methodologies from a range of disciplines. To date, most of the critical theoretical perspectives in CEL have been found in the literature on undergraduate service-learning. Addressing issues of power and privilege and how to apply these as part of student learning experiences define much of this work (Mitchell, 2008). Despite these theoretical contributions, the literature on graduate student experiences has limited engagement with these theoretical orientations or ones that apply directly to scholarship. One notable exception is a 2023 participatory action research project led by undergraduate and graduate students focused on the development of "The Unguide," an online student resource aimed to provide guidance for those hold power in higher education (Do et al., 2023). This resource provides perspectives from individuals representing first-generation, BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, Latinx, Low-income, and/or disabled students from six public universities. The authors argue for centering the lived experiences of students when assessing

factors that impact student success and engagement in higher education, as well as dismantling systems of oppression.

Specific to graduate education, a few of the articles in this review did directly address issues of power, privilege and Whiteness (Darling et al., 2014; Del Nero, 2017). Related, several of the case studies in this literature review spoke to some of the challenges in carrying out community partnerships and demonstrated benefit to these partners but did not explicitly address power dynamics. However, several of the articles reviewed do engage with social justice issues. For example, Chupp and Joseph (2010) provided examples of integrating a long-term engaged learning component to their Master's in Social Work program. While they started out operating in a traditional paradigm, focused on the needs of students and the university, over the course of several years, they revised programming to center the needs of the community with social justice as an end goal. Similarly, Thurber and Suiter (2019) wrote about the experience of coaching students out of their comfort zone into more justice-oriented engaged learning. These articles provide a basis for what future work might look like that takes a more critical stance on CEL within graduate education, as would identifying pedagogy distinct to the experience of graduate students (compared with undergraduate students). This might include a need for a greater focus on the application of theoretical knowledge (Mattson et al., 2013; Wheat et al., 2019). Similarly, a greater emphasis on technical and analytical skills is warranted in the case of professional graduate training (Latimore et al., 2014; Moser et al., 2023). In addition, scholarship on graduate training that foregrounds epistemic choices is another area in need of attention. This might include introduction of critical university studies (Ferguson, 2012; Moten & Harney, 2004), decolonial and indigenous epistemologies and pedagogies (la paperson, 2017; Patel, 2014, 2019; Tuck & Yang, 2014), and other schools of thought that center epistemic equity in CEL.

Methodologically, there is a need for more comparative case studies and systematic analyses that go beyond subjective measures of community impact to include multiple universities and colleges, the perspectives of community partners and learning experiences over time.² Of the articles reviewed, nearly half utilized the individual case study method, although there were several examples that presented more comprehensive and innovative methodologies. For example, Kniffin and colleagues (2021a, 2021b) used a structured reflection process to produce autoethnographies based on experiences of a graduate student network organization, concluding that diverse voices are lacking in leadership positions but that professional associations are vital to developing the next generation of practitioner scholars. Similarly, Hubrig et al. (2017) and Goodhue (2017) drew on the narratives of graduate students to assess various CEL experiences. These methodologies add value to the field in that they foreground the needs and experiences of graduate students in ways that can lead to improvements in future program development. Similarly, Bain (2018) focused on the assessment of graduate student experiences and also integrated community partner interviews as part of assessment research. Given the power differentials that often exist between researchers and the communities they work in, it is vital that scholarship more systematically assesses graduate education vis-à-vis community needs and outcomes. Beyond individual cases, several studies examined longer-term outcomes. Drnach and colleagues (2016) used a survey of alumni who had and had not participated in a service-learning course, finding that students with CEL were more likely to engage in other service activities and gained skills to support them doing so. Similarly, Laursen and colleagues (2012) used semi-structured interviews with alumni who had participated in a science outreach program, examining the long-term impacts for graduate students who worked with the program to illustrate how CEL experiences open new career paths for graduate students.

In addition, there is a need for distinguishing and clarifying differences between CEL experiences in doctoral, master's, and professional degree programs. Of the articles reviewed, 35% focused on doctoral training, with 21% and 18% addressing master's and professional students, respectively. About 26% of the

² For example, Carnegie's Elective Classification for Community Engagement, which includes over 400 universities and colleges that have received this distinction, could require more detailed reporting on graduate education as well as disaggregating graduate student from undergraduate education data. This would provide a new source of data for researchers interested in studying graduate education.

articles addressed a combination of these three categories of the graduate student experience. In these articles, many failed to make distinctions between the different types of graduate students included in their analyses. However, the ways in which community engagement is taught and expectations of how students engage community partners may vary given the different foci between research and practical skills. Future research should delve deeper into the diversity of graduate degrees and the pedagogical goals therein.

Supporting Graduate Students as Engaged Scholars and Teachers

Relatedly, an area in need of greater distinction from master's and professional training is providing opportunities for doctoral students to develop research skills and advance their individual scholarship. Graduate student involvement in the articles reviewed tended to take place in a class or team setting with an existing research project that provided opportunities for students to learn important research skills, identify research topics to explore, and inform the selection of research methods. While such experiences can build skills, competence, and confidence, they seldom create space for graduate students to practice their own community-engaged scholarship. Thus, when graduate students do undertake their individual research, they may experience challenges, such as internalizing institutional norms that delegitimize community voices (Del Nero, 2017) and difficulties in maintaining authentic community voices in scholarly outputs (Ewan, 2019).

Of the 57 articles reviewed, less than 10% address programming or formalized support for graduate students conducting their own engaged scholarship. Of these, the most comprehensive programs that support graduate students in effectively and ethically integrating engagement into their scholarship were described by Matthews et al. (2015) and Doberneck et al. (2017). The programs they describe were structured credentials (certifications or portfolios) that include workshops or courses and connect the graduate students with a faculty advisor to develop specific competencies that support their individual community-engagement interests. Less intensive approaches to supporting graduate student engaged scholarship include individual courses (Latimore et al., 2014) and support for students to participate in CEL professional networks (Kniffin et al., 2021a, 2021b). In addition, some articles described involving graduate students as instructors or teaching assistants in CEL. For example, Gumpert and Kraybill-Greggo (2005) conducted a study focused on graduate students trained in group practice who led a group of undergraduate students during an alternative spring break. Several articles also described experiences that imparted new teaching skills as well as integrated CEL into future teaching careers (Garrison & Jaeger, 2014; Matthews et al., 2015, 2022). However, the development of graduate students as future teachers who incorporate community engagement into learning experiences was absent in most of the literature. Research that focused on training graduate students in the pedagogy of community engagement would complement the need for research skill development.

Conclusion

An important contribution from future scholars will be to address gaps in graduate education scholarship and embark on new areas of research. In addition to the themes and focal areas from prior research identified in this article, that is, student learning outcomes, pedagogical practices, community partner involvement, student autoethnographies, program development and evaluation, and institutional factors, specific praxis research foci will not only address gaps in the literature but also bolster efforts to deepen and expand the reach of CEL in graduate education. Among these include further integration of CEL into STEMM graduate education, broadening theoretical and methodological repertoires, and supporting graduate students as engaged scholars and teachers.

A primary motivation for writing this article was to assess the scholarship of CEL in graduate education and to identify areas in need of greater attention. One such area is a focus on institutional factors and documenting the various ways in which graduate students are being supported by university executives. We suspect there is significant development in this area, but documentation of such efforts is lacking. Indeed, this is an exciting moment for scholars from all backgrounds and institutional affiliations to expand

research and institutional support for graduate education. Training the next generation of engaged scholars is vital to reimagining the public purpose of higher education and expanding the type of scholarship that is being produced, by and for whom, and with what societal and community benefits.

Advancing CEL in graduate education requires not only greater and more intentional coordination of resources and supports across institutions of higher education but also among the various national organizations that can support graduate students in CEL. Networks and resources such as the Graduate Student Network and the “Dissertation Dish” sponsored by the International Association for Research on Service-Learning and Community Engagement, the dedicated “dissertation overviews” section in the *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*, as well as resources open to practitioners at any level including graduate students (e.g., Campus Compact’s microcredentialing program; webinars and panels from the Engagement Scholarship Consortium, etc.), all suggest that supporting graduate students in CEL is an area of continued interest. In addition, future investigations by, with, and of graduate students through the Carnegie Elective Classifications Research Lab may provide key new directions for research on these topics.

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