Evolution of a Profession: A review of *The Community Engagement Professional in Higher Education: A Competency Model for an Emerging Field*

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Reviewed in this article: *The Community Engagement Professional in Higher Education: A Competency Model for an Emerging Field*. Edited by Lina D. Dostilio. Campus Compact, Boston, MA. March 2017. ISBN: 978-1945459030. 224 pages.

In *The Community Engagement Professional in Higher Education: A Competency Model for an Emerging Field,* editor Lina D. Dostilio and her co-authors collectively assemble—through rigorous literature reviews and a survey of more than 400 respondents—a comprehensive list of competencies and personal attributes of community engagement professionals (CEPs) (Dostilio, 2016; Dostilio & McReynolds, 2015; Jacoby & Mutascio, 2010; McReynolds & Shields, 2015), professional staff whose primary role on a university campus is to manage and support a wide spectrum of initiatives around community-campus partnerships. The volume is an important one, both for its attempt to identify the core characteristics and expertise needed to negotiate these increasingly nuanced partnerships and for its ability to illuminate the magnitude of responsibilities and resources that institutions of higher education need to employ in order to successfully impact their surrounding communities.

The challenge of putting together *The Community Engagement Professional in Higher Education* and capturing the multiple manifestations of CEPs' work and roles on campuses was no small task. Indeed, most readers of this type of book understand that there is no one or "right" way of doing community engagement. A bird's-eye view of how colleges and universities have institutionalized engagement shows that CEPs can operate under any number of distinct roles; they might, for instance, be professional or administrative staff, they might be faculty, or they could perhaps have dual roles as faculty leaders or part-time staff with teaching responsibilities. They also draw their knowledge and expertise from a number of professional backgrounds, from strict academic research to experience in the nonprofit or corporate world. Given this diversity of roles and professional orientations, this volume endeavors to identify a set of common characteristics of the professional role of the CEP. It also illustrates the essential need for CEPs to ensure that community engagement initiatives are highlighted, monitored, and evaluated and that those initiatives strive in authentic ways to meet the public mission of the university and enhance the overall social good.

On the surface, the contributing authors offer a guide for further professionalizing the field. On a much broader scale, however, the authors issue a call to action to CEPs: mobilize and organize your areas of expertise, know who you are and how CEPs operate, understand the context of your institution, and, most importantly, know your own strengths and what methods or approaches to this work are best for you as both a scholar and a professional.

In Chapter 1, "An Explanation of Community Engagement Professionals as Professionals and Leaders," Dostilio and Lane G. Perry offer a basic definition of the community engagement professional, yet one that is nuanced on many levels, depending on the context of the multiple manifestations of CEPs' work and roles on college and university campuses. Moreover, they identify CEPs as leaders essential to

advancing the overall public mission of institution, recognizing that those leadership approaches comprise various identities: the "tempered radical," whose work and identity transcends the boundaries of the campus to serve larger social justice ideals; the "transformational leader," who negotiates systems of power and clears the path for empowerment and capacity building for the entire organization; and the "social entrepreneur," who seeks innovative approaches and solutions to a community's most pressing social problems. Chapter 2, "Planning a Path Forward," considers these identities more deeply by advancing specific "knowledge, skills and dispositions" associated with CEPs. The crux of this work centers on a broad literature review (spanning the remaining chapters of the book), the development of a pilot framework and survey reviewed by external experts, and a systematic collection of data and analysis of findings from a survey of 414 respondents from a wide array of backgrounds (i.e., center directors, program coordinators, faculty leaders, research scholars, and administrators). The authors acknowledge that creating such a list of competencies might relegate the work of the CEP to a neoliberal approach to engagement work; however, acknowledging the skills and expertise needed to advance engagement work mirrors the evolution of community engagement as a whole at colleges and universities. As the context, outcomes, and impacts evolve, the authors argue, it is essential to understand the actors who ensure that the work also continues to evolve.

The central five chapters of the book are the "meatiest" in that they detail the range of characteristics and attributes of CEPs. Chapters 3 through 8 focus extensively on those multiple manifestations of CEP work that, when taking a broader view of higher education, can prove confounding to even the most adept and accomplished leader. Indeed, when reading this volume, there were many moments when I asked myself, "Is this feasible? Can CEPs possibly attend to all of these needs?" As the chief CEP on my campus, it took effort to decentralize myself from the sheer magnitude of the work CEPs do, especially considering that there are many CEPs who, like me, operate as sole practitioners on campus and balance these competencies against CEPs who have five, 10, or even 25 staff members to whom they can delegate a large number of tasks. Chapter 3, "Critical Perspectives and Commitments," centers on the theoretical foundations of engagement work and demonstrates that the evolution of the CEP role has paralleled that of community engagement in higher education as a whole. Over the past 25 years, critical perspectives on scholarly and pedagogical approaches to community engagement and service-learning, such as Tania Mitchell's critical service-learning (2008), have demanded crucial reflection and reevaluation of CEP practice. As such, the profession has evolved from placement and tracking of student volunteers to consciousness of power relations and the disruption of the status quo. Chapters 4 ("Program Administration and Evaluation") and 5 ("Envisioning, Leading, and Enacting Institutional Change for the Public Good") place CEPs at the center of measuring and evaluating the impact and benefit (if any) of an institution's community partnerships, and reinforce the need for skills and expertise in navigating the increasingly complex context of the higher education industry as it faces its own economic challenges and broad public skepticism about its overall value. Chapters 6 ("Institutionalizing Community-Campus Engagement"), 7 ("Supporting Student Learning & Development"), and 8 ("High Quality Community-Campus Partnerships") maintain that not only must CEPs understand student social and civic development, communicate engagement priorities, and promote their benefits to multiple stakeholders, they must also speak the different languages of those stakeholders so that the overall goal of "public good" is met. This means, for instance, speaking the language of retention and graduation rates and revenue generation to the administration, assisting faculty as they navigate their own meritocracy in conveying the public dimensions of their work, and communicating in the language of capacity building and systemic social change to community partners.

Community engagement professionals, regardless of their background, expertise, or rank within an institution, are uniquely positioned to contextualize their work in ways that are meaningful and impactful to the communities within which they work. These professionals have an intimate connection to community and social issues, and they cannot and must not allow their work to disengage from the political. The CEP serves as an essential change agent within a highly technocratic environment, which can, at times, appear to be a tall order. Knowing full well that they operate within institutions that embrace hierarchy and entrenched ideals, how can CEPs be expected to know all? To do all? How do

they balance these competencies with other priorities—economic, scholarly, social-justice, diversity, and inclusion? They must do this by showing that the work of community engagement flows through and binds all that institutions of higher education do. The strength of *The Community Engagement Professional in Higher Education* is its commitment to advancing the professional identity of the community engagement professional. The value of this extensive work lies in its ability to communicate the dimensions of a vast and varied field, elevating CEPs far above those first-generation perceptions of them as volunteer coordinators. At its core, this volume is about communicating and professionalizing a field. For most CEPs, the majority of its contents will not come as a surprise, but the book can certainly serve as a guide for professional development and future research. For college and university leaders and faculty who might not understand the extent to which CEPs and the engagement field contribute to the overall mission of the institution, this volume is an essential addition to their night-table reading.

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