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# **Situating Civic Engagement in a Global Context: A Review of *Higher Education and Civic Engagement***

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## **Situating Civic Engagement in a Global Context: A Review of *Higher Education and Civic Engagement***

*Higher Education and Civic Engagement: Comparative Perspectives*. Edited by Lorraine McIlrath, Ann Lyons, & Ronaldo Munck. Palgrave Macmillan, New York. 2012. ISBN: 978-0-230-34037-4. 268 pp.

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Since the mid-1980s, much has been written about civic engagement in American higher education. Recent publications have elucidated the concept and practice of civic engagement (e.g., Bowen, 2010; Jacoby, 2009), promoted civic responsibility as a student endeavor (e.g., Battistoni & Longo, 2011), and examined the role of academic professionals in civic life through scholarship and education (Peters, 2010). Boyer's (1990, 1996) "engaged scholarship" promptings were largely responsible for sharpening the focus on the public purposes and civic mission of higher education in the United States.

*Higher Education and Civic Engagement: Comparative Perspectives* is a welcome addition to the literature because it places civic engagement in a global context and offers a fairly comprehensive treatment of the topic. Furthermore, it challenges higher education to be a transformative force for cultural, economic, and social change in a world still caught in the throes of globalization.

A cursory glance at *Higher Education and Civic Engagement* reveals that civic engagement has proliferated as a result of the work of national, regional, and international networks. Notable among them are Campus Compact (United States), Campus Engage (Ireland), the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (United Kingdom), Red Iberoamericana de Compromiso Social y Voluntariado Universitario (Latin America), the South African Higher Education Community Engagement Forum, and the Talloires Network for Civic Engagement. Products of these and other networks include Campus Compact's *Wingspread Declaration on Renewing the Civic Mission of the American Research University*; the United Kingdom's *Manifesto for Public Engagement*; Australia's *Charter and Principles of University Community Engagement*; the Association of Commonwealth Universities' consultation document, *Engagement as a Core Value for the University*; and the Talloires Network's *Declaration on the Civic Roles and Social Responsibilities of Higher Education*.

The editors of *Higher Education and Civic Engagement* are three Ireland-based educators. Lorraine McIlrath is director of the Community Knowledge Initiative at the National University of Ireland, Galway; Ann Lyons is a coordinator at Campus Engage, the network for the promotion of civic engagement in Irish higher education; and Ronaldo Munck is a professor at Dublin City University. They tapped the vast experience and expertise of engagement scholar-practitioners from regions near and far to explore the many manifestations of civic engagement in relation to teaching and learning, research, and service. The contributing authors identify volunteering, outreach, service-learning, community-based learning, community-based participatory research (CBPR), and engaged scholarship among such manifestations.

*Higher Education and Civic Engagement* is divided into three sections: Context and Concepts, Manifestations and Issues, and Reflections on Practice. In the first of the book's 13 chapters, Munck, Helen McQuillan, and Joanna Ozarowska describe challenges and opportunities for engagement in an era of global austerity, when universities are experiencing pressure to become more business-

oriented. The coauthors present engagement as a complex web of interactions among education, enterprise, and community. They see an important role for universities in “a socially challenged world” (p. 25) that needs enhanced human and social capital development as well as improved infrastructure and capacity building.

The three other chapters in section one, while touching on the conceptual and philosophical underpinnings of civic engagement, contribute much to our understanding of higher education’s role in societal change. Brenda Gourley draws upon her experience as a university leader in South Africa to demonstrate the importance of bringing community representation into the decision-making processes of higher education institutions dealing with a multiplicity of issues. Josephine Boland proposes “a robust and well-articulated policy framework” (p. 56) to support a shared vision of engagement, while Hans Schuetze highlights the need for assessment and support mechanisms to sustain engagement.

In the second section, Michael Cuthill articulates the merits of engaged scholarship, particularly CBPR, as a vehicle to advance the university’s civic mission. Robert Bringle and Patti Clayton, in an expertly illustrated chapter, cogently analyze service-learning and extol its benefits as an avenue for civic education, as the basis for reciprocal partnerships between university and community constituencies, and as a catalyst for increased civic engagement. Lorraine Tansey then reviews the literature and presents a case study on volunteering. Finally, McIlrath’s chapter offers a research-grounded community perspective on university partnership.

The final section of *Higher Education and Civic Engagement* is composed of five chapters that contain insights from Spain, Ireland, Latin America, the Middle East, and the UK. José Arco, Francisco Fernández, Patricia Morales, Maribel Miñaca, and Miriam Hervás reflect on service-learning’s contribution to knowledge transfer and innovation at their institution in Spain; Lyons comments on the results of a survey of civic engagement practices in Irish higher education; and Maria Nieves Tapia shows how, in the Latin American experience, academic excellence and community engagement are not conflicting but complementary. For their part, Cynthia Myntti, Mounir Mabsout, and Rami Zurayk contribute Arab World perspectives on advocacy and facilitation of civic engagement to produce citizens “committed to the wider social good” (p. 217), promote social responsibility, and support democratic movements. In the concluding chapter, Sophie Duncan and Paul Manners share lessons learned from a major public engagement project in the UK.

*Higher Education and Civic Engagement* includes a foreword by Ahmed Bawa, a university administrator, and Munck, the coeditor, as well as afterthoughts by writer Mary O’Malley. Bawa and Munck suggest that universities should pursue civic engagement policies and practices in support of a globalization agenda that addresses climate change, infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS, social exclusion, and other global challenges.

Civic engagement is multifaceted; engagement approaches, activities, and perspectives are necessarily diverse. *Higher Education and Civic Engagement: Comparative Perspectives* captures many elements of such diversity while indicating a common global concern among institutions for the social and economic well-being of their surrounding communities.

Although the organization of the book into discrete sections seems somewhat artificial—because many of the 13 chapters include all of the sectional elements—by and large, *Higher Education and Civic Engagement* is well-structured, with useful in-chapter cross-references. Further, the book is actually more about *comparable* rather than *comparative* perspectives on civic engagement—which in no way diminishes the book’s value. To be sure, *Higher Education and Civic Engagement* makes a considerable contribution to the advancement of civic engagement by widening and deepening the discourse in an international context. University leaders, program administrators, and faculty interested in the civic role of higher education institutions in the global community will find this book interesting and informative, and perhaps even inspiring.

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