

Public Engagement and U.S. Higher Education: Addressing New Century Challenges

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Topics for this session

- Historical context: Emergence of U.S. universities as “engaged institutions”
- How U.S. institutions develop and carry out engagement agendas based on their unique history, mission, and identity
- Motivation for engagement? How engagement impacts the university and society
- Critical perspectives on engagement

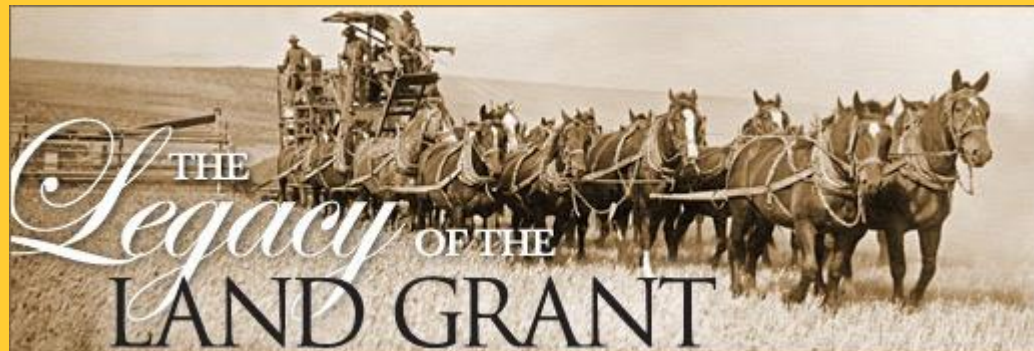
Key Attributes of U.S. Higher Education System

- Fiercely independent! Formed with little regulation, reflect values of founders
- Diverse institutions across sectors (public/private, four/two year)
- Diverse constituents that shape purposes (federal, state, students, alumni, industry)
- Importance of philanthropy

Public purposes of U.S. colonial colleges: Developing civic leaders and theologians for societal benefit

Institution	Year	Religious Affiliation
Harvard College	1636	Puritan
College of William & Mary	1693	Anglican
Yale College	1701	Congregationalist
College of Philadelphia (University of Pennsylvania)	1740	Nonsectarian
College of New Jersey (Princeton University)	1746	Presbyterian
King's College (Columbia University)	1754	Anglican
College of Rhode Island (Brown University)	1765	Baptist
Queen's College (Rutgers University)	1766	Dutch Reformed
Dartmouth	1769	Congregationalist

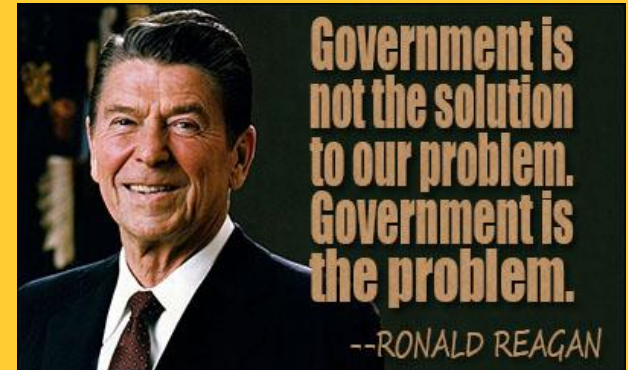
Land-Grant Universities (1862): Federal legislation to promote college access, agriculture/practical arts, western expansion



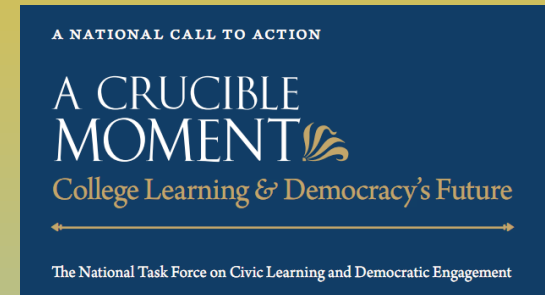
Late 19th Century- Mid-20th Century: Sustained growth and public confidence in U.S. higher education



Mid- 1960s and beyond: U.S. higher education viewed as out-of-touch, unaccountable, failing to deliver on promises



1980s- present: National movements to reclaim U.S. higher education's civic mission



Ernest L.
Boyer

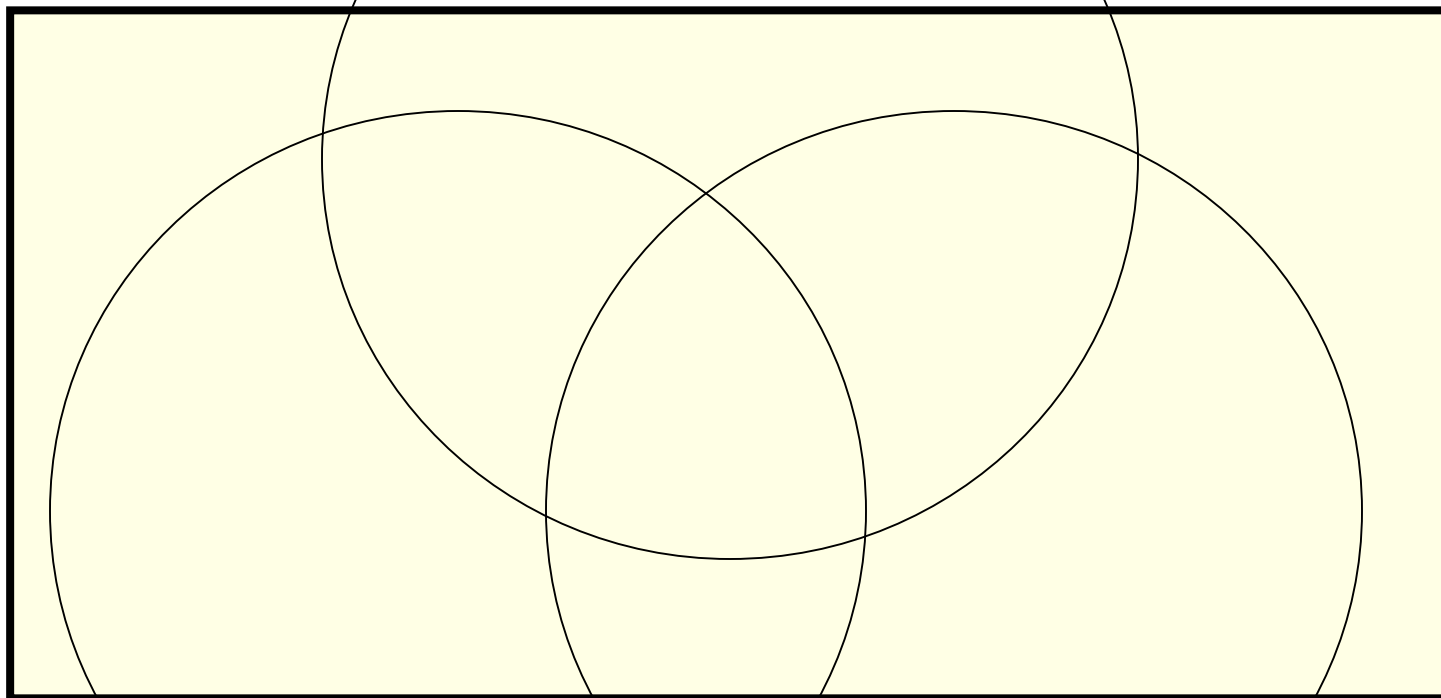
The Engaged Campus

COMMUNITY



RESEARCH

Furco, A., (2010). *British Journal of Educational Sciences*, 58(4), 375-390.



TEACHING

SERVICE

Engagement as a strategy to advance collegiate/societal goals

Summary of institutional and public benefits

Institutional benefits	Public benefits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Engaged teaching (service-learning) is a high impact practice. Benefits diverse learners (Kuh and Associates, Indiana U) -Bolsters retention, graduation rates, performance; supports accreditation -Facilitates interdisciplinary partnerships/new discoveries -Positions recruitment of Millennial students and future faculty -Creates unique niche for an institution for fundraising/marketing (leverages public and private support for engaged work) -Enhances visibility/use of research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> --Enhanced leadership capacity in a region (collective impact) -- Leverages student and faculty leadership to support other sectors (non-profit, other) -- Facilitates economic development, industry partnerships for economic growth --Enhances social change opportunities: advocacy, public work for long-term change --Leverages university fundraising capacity in service of community/regional needs - Moves toward end goal: Healthy, flourishing communities

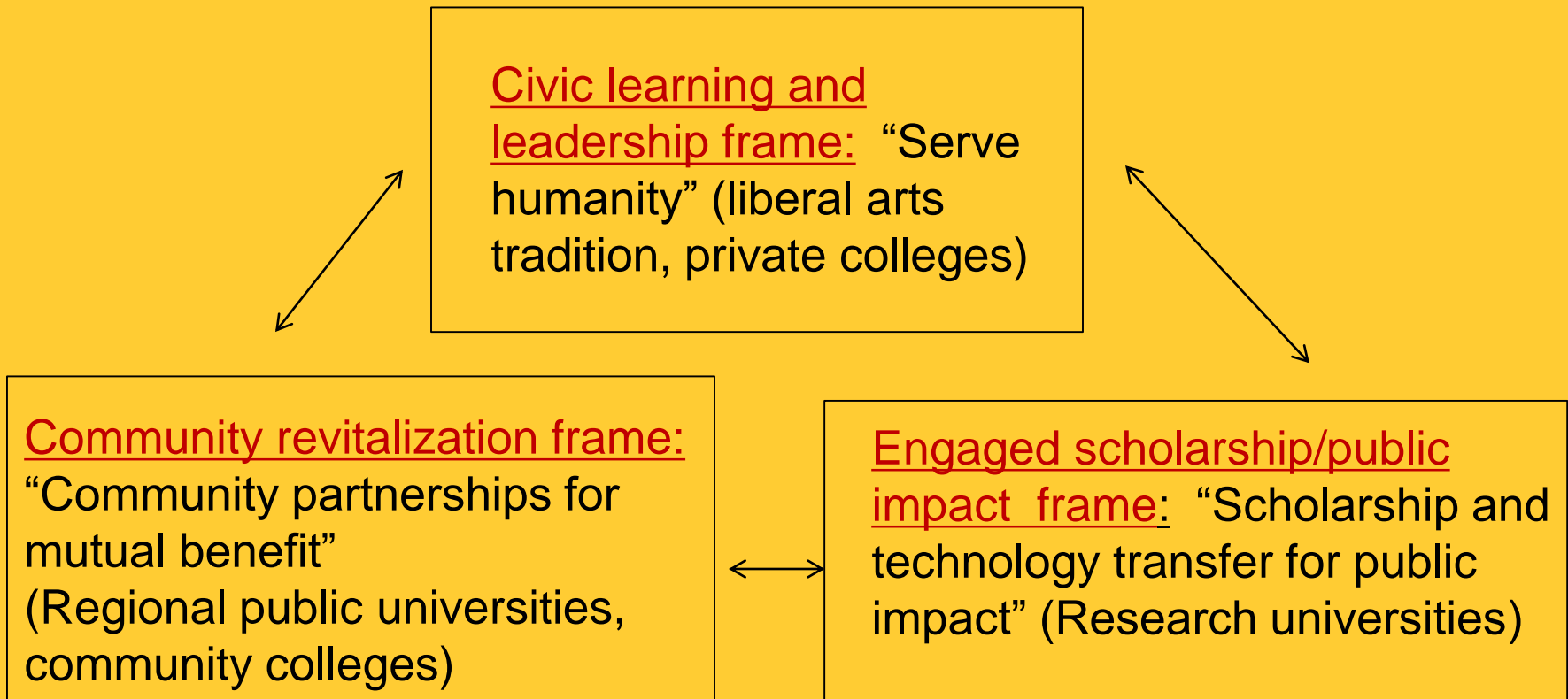
Adoption of engagement in the U.S. is uneven, nuanced, and rooted in campus identity

How do we explain current patterns of organizing?

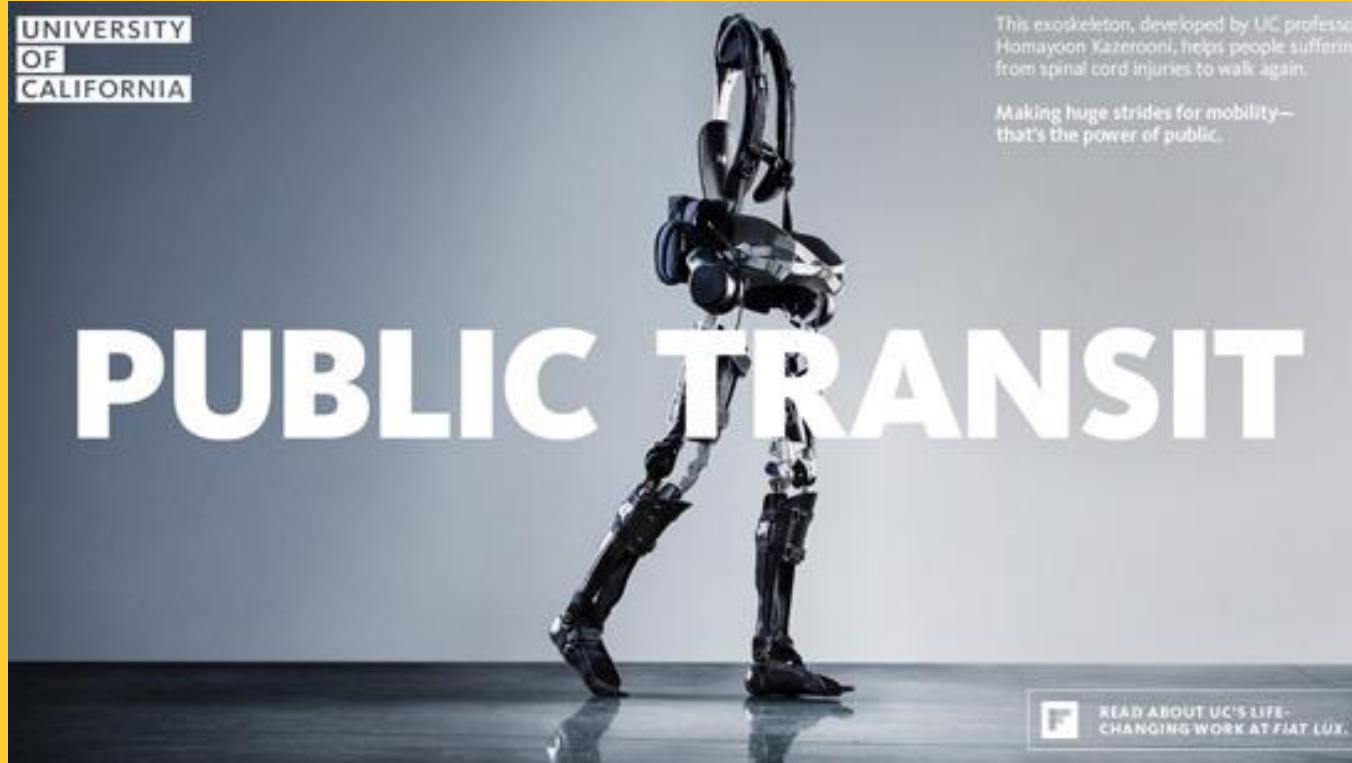
- *Path dependence*: History shapes/limits institutional expression based on positive feedback and accumulative advantage
- *Resource dependence*: Engagement as a competitive strategy to meet expectations of primary resource providers and expand/diversify revenue

Weerts, D., J., & Freed, G. F. (forthcoming). Public engagement and organizational identity in U.S. higher education. *Recherches Sociologiques et Anthropologiques*, 2016 /1

Engagement practices aligned with institutional identity/narrative: Three dominant frames



Engaged scholarship/public impact frame



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This exoskeleton, developed by UC professor Homayoon Kazerooni, helps people suffering from spinal cord injuries to walk again.

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PUBLIC TRANSIT

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The advertisement features a black and white photograph of a person wearing a complex, futuristic exoskeleton. The person is standing on a reflective surface, and the exoskeleton is highly detailed with various mechanical components. The background is a plain, light-colored wall. The text is overlaid on the image in a clean, sans-serif font.

**University
of California
System**

Engaged scholarship/public impact frame: Strategic advantages and benefits

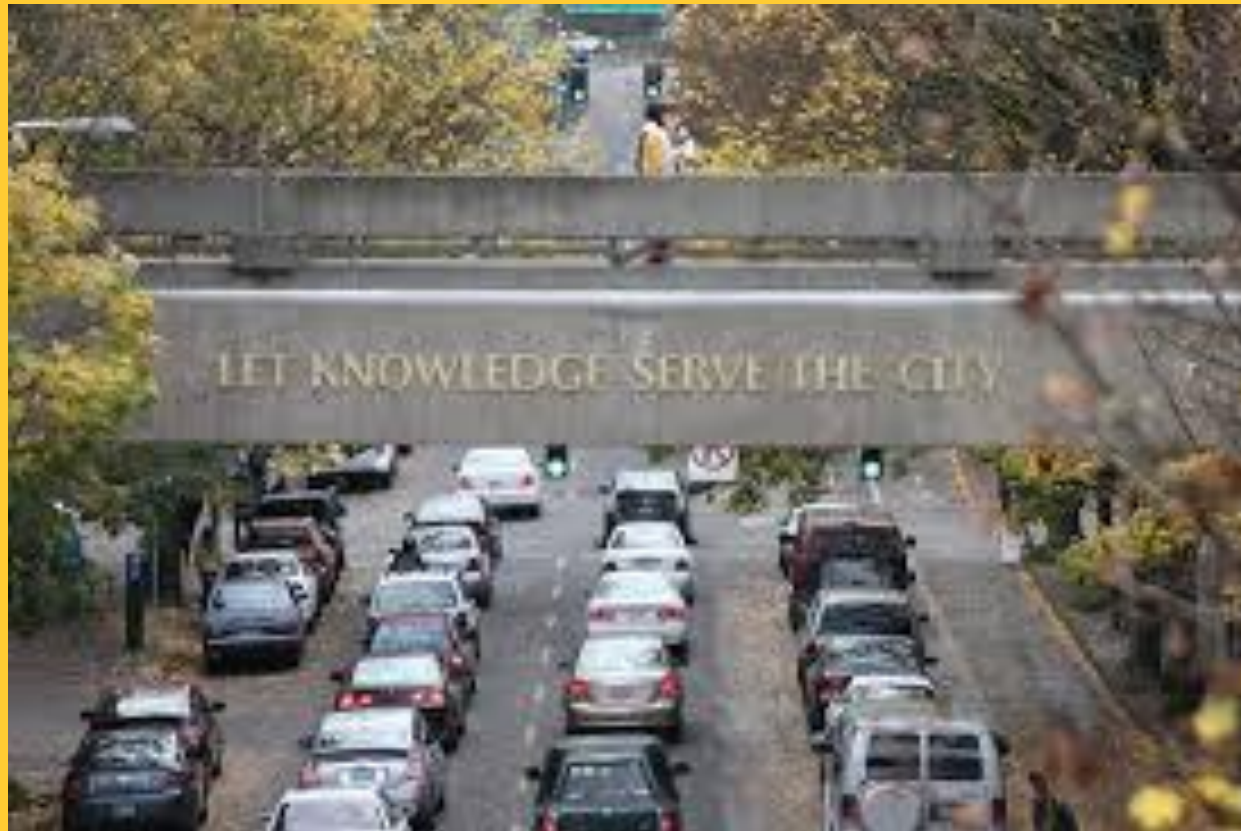
- Engagement advanced in a way that is compatible with research university culture, history, and accumulative advantage
- Promotes interdisciplinary scholarship: “Grand Challenges” as new way to organize
- Aligns with priorities of resource providers: federal research grants (resource dependence)
- “Broader impacts” (National Science Foundation, NSF)



Critical perspectives and challenges

- Engagement at research universities: more smoke than fire? Rhetoric or reality?
- Research universities least advanced in this work due to history/culture (path dependence limits)
- Most difficult institutions to reward engaged work among faculty (global/local priorities?)
- Often enclaved “engaged” units, not institutionalized
- Staff often carry out engagement agenda, not faculty

Community revitalization frame



**Portland State
University
Portland, Oregon**

Community revitalization frame: Strategic advantages and benefits

- Engagement advanced as competitive strategy to differentiate institutions from elite research universities (more institutionalized/strategic plan).
- Framed as means to address key campus and community priorities
- Institutional performance: retention, recruitment, return on investment.
- Regional progress: Social/economic goals
- Leverages public and private funding

Critical perspectives and challenges

- Few downsides to this approach for regional public universities!
- Some faculty aspire to research university positions, may view as incompatible
- Perception that quality of scholarship is uneven, more “service” than scholarship.
- Managing community expectations and institutional capacity



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Civic learning and
leadership frame



FUTURE
CIVIC
LEADERS



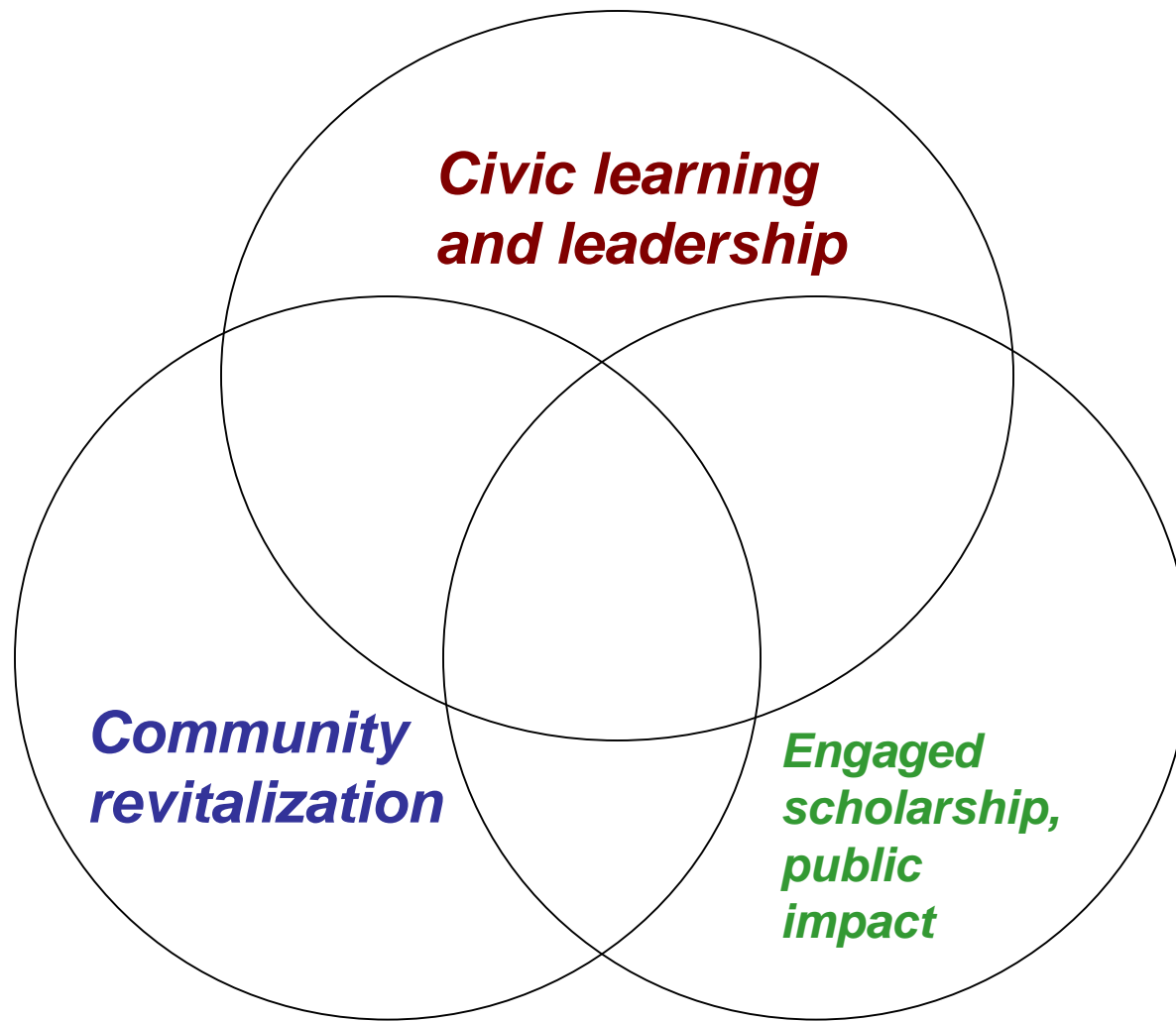
Civic learning and leadership frame: Strategic advantages and benefits

- Engagement advanced in a way that advances its teaching/leadership mission, builds on accumulative advantage (path dependence)
- “Brand” of engagement most aligned with expectations of primary resource providers (students, parents, donors, alumni)
- Framed as means to address key campus priorities which are student-focused (student learning, retention, recruitment “niche”)

Critical perspectives and challenges

- Engagement agenda often less “place-bound” and may not capture interest of local resource providers (e.g., who is humanity? Is this engagement?)
- Some may perceive that work may be more ideological or reflecting historic worldview of the institution (could also be strength).
- Few downsides— shown to be an important recruiting tool to attract Millennial students

The “Multi-Identity” Engaged Institution



Institutions typically espouse their most salient civic identity

Institutionalizing engagement: Common infrastructure and models across frames

- Central coordinating entity (e.g., Office of Public Engagement) associated with academic administration
- Primary focus of office(s) may vary based on salient engagement frame (e.g., service-learning, community-based research, technology transfer, outreach and extension)
- Best practice: office leader holds a cabinet position and academic appointment (Vice President/Provost)
- Administrative staff and graduate assistants to assist in programming (forums, training, coordination, administration, communications, grant-writing, etc.)

Welsh, M. & Saltmarsh, J., (2013). Current practice and infrastructures for campus centers of university engagement. *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*, 17(4), 25-56.

Key programs and strategies to institutionalize engagement

- Faculty support! (grants, professional development, assist with framing promotion dossier)
- Students (service-learning, engagement course designators, awards programs)
- Community partner support (training on engaged pedagogy, awards programs, etc.)
- Advisory board: representation of faculty, students, to guide agenda
- College centers/institutes may play key roles at research universities

Monitoring and measuring engagement: Data collection to serve institutional purposes

- Preparation for external review or recognition (Carnegie classification, accreditation)
- Document impacts/outcomes: Public, community, government, alumni relations
- Attract external support or funding
- Data collection strategy has specific purposes— should not “collect everything”

Slide courtesy of Barbara Holland, 2015

Engagement as a strategy to carry out elements of strategic plan (e.g., high quality teaching/research)

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GREATEST CHALLENGES.**

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Summary: U.S. institutions that are successful in advancing a public engagement agenda...

- Advance engagement in a way that is compatible with their history, mission, place, resource opportunities (interpretive and adaptive strategies)
- Build an infrastructure that supports engagement as an institutionalized practice (faculty-focused)
- Position engagement in ways that profit the institution and individual ambitions (e.g., strategic plan, performance: retention, recruitment; “brand” distinction, faculty promotion and tenure)

Addressing prevailing criticisms and barriers

- Challenge of measurement. What do we measure engagement outcomes? Is it making a difference?
- Difficulty in assessing high quality engaged scholarship. What counts as scholarship?
- View among faculty that engagement is an “add on” and requires more money to implement.
- View that work is ideological, for activist faculty
- Engagement perceived as competing, not advancing institutional priorities (prestige, preeminence).

Engagement in the U.S. is a work in progress!



Questions and Discussion

Thank you!



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