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Where is Community Studies in Higher Education? Institutionalizing a Scholarship of Engagement

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Welcome. My name is Dan W. Butin and I am an assistant professor of education at Gettysburg College. It is my pleasure to be sitting with four colleagues who have graciously given of their time to be here as well. Adenrele Awotona, Dean of the College of Public and Community Service at University of Massachusetts, Boston; Katharine Kravetz, Assistant Professor at American University; Andy Mott, Executive Director of the Community Learning Project based here in D.C.; and Mary Beth Pudup, Associate Professor and Chair of the Community Studies department at the University of California, Santa Cruz.

My goal for this session is to address what “community studies” was, is today, and could be within higher education. It is to begin a larger discussion about the value and viability of community studies programs for the future of a truly liberal education.

The session will flow as follows: I want to provide an overview of the community studies field. The other panel members will then each give a short presentation from different perspectives about similar issues concerning community studies. Adenrele will provide a college-level perspective of community studies; Mary Beth will provide a departmental perspective; Katharine will give an example of a specific course that she teaches – “Transforming Communities”; and Andy will conclude with an overview of a recent study he completed that looked nationally at universities’ role in preparing future leaders of community groups and social change organizations. I want to then open up the floor for a larger discussion between all of us about the potential value and viability of community studies in the academy. I should also note that all of the information I will be presenting, plus a whole host of additional links, resources, and information, can be found on my website (which is listed at the top of my handout).

My argument will be – this is the “who cares?” question – that community studies stands at the nexus of teaching and research. By linking rigorous academic coursework with immersive and consequential community-based learning, community studies programs embody the connections and engagement desired between the academy and its local and global communities. What community studies truly offers – to students, the institution, and the community – is a legitimate academic space from which to foster a meaningful praxis of theory and practice. There are multiple synergistic pedagogical and institutional components here: community studies is about good teaching and learning; it is about research that matters; it is about, to use the terminology of Harry Boyte, the director of the Center for Democracy and Citizenship at the University of Minnesota (<http://www.publicwork.org/>), public work.

To begin I want to ask “why community studies now?” Community Studies, as I will describe in more detail in just a moment, was a thriving subfield of sociology during the 1950 and 60s, which went into disrepute by the early 1970s as its conceptions of “community” were deemed theoretically incoherent, its methodology suspect, and its conclusions irrelevant in our “post-industrial” world where technology, media, and high-speed transportation seemingly destroyed all notions of the continuity and relevance of place (Bell & Newby, 1972; Stacey, 1969).

Yet today scholars from across the humanities and social sciences have been returning to the concept of “community studies.” One driving force behind this, I want to suggest, is higher education’s attempted appropriation of the “scholarship of engagement.” Ernest Boyer, in *Scholarship Reconsidered* (Boyer, 1990), argued that we must rethink how we view the relationship between teaching and scholarship in the academy. He argued specifically for four distinctive types of scholarships: of teaching (or sharing knowledge), of discovery, of integration, and of application and engagement. By the latter, he meant an “application of knowledge as a reflective practice in which theory and practice inform each other.” While several recent books have argued that some colleges and universities *have* in fact embraced such an ideal (Huber & Hutchings, 2005; O’Meara & Rice, 2005), the reality is that this movement is much more about tinkering than transformation. To put it in the terminology of the educational historian Larry Cuban (1990, 1998), there have been a lot of incremental rather than fundamental changes.

But these incremental changes are relevant and widespread. The scholarship of engagement can be seen manifest in numerous ways across the academy: experiential learning, service-learning, undergraduate research, community-based research, the scholarship of teaching and learning movement are just some of the more prominent. All of these programs attempt, to one extent or another, to manifest a self-reflexive turn that links teaching to scholarship, theory to practice, cognitive to affective learning, and colleges to communities. Yet for all of their promise, most of these initiatives continue to reside at the periphery of actual practices and policies in higher education: they are not “hard wired” into institutional policies and structures and are oftentimes deemed by faculty as too co-curricular and detrimental for traditional tenure and promotion committees. Service-learning is for me the exemplar here. If done well, service-learning offers a profoundly powerful opportunity to link classrooms with communities and theory with real-world issues. Yet for all of the fiscal, institutional and human resources devoted to service-learning, there remain immense and pervasive barriers to its successful institutionalization (Butin, 2003, 2005, in press).

It is here that community studies enters the picture. For service-learning, as many of the programs under the umbrella of the “scholarship of engagement,” works very, very hard to legitimate itself as a relevant and respectable academic practice. Yet there is, I would argue, very little traction for such legitimation. On the other hand, many academic disciplines are working very, very hard to prove their relevance and applicability outside of the so-called ivory tower. (See, for example, the American Sociology Association’s very recent and public foray into *Public Sociology*; see the ASA’s task force <http://pubsoc.wisc.edu/>; Michael Burroway, <http://sociology.berkeley.edu/faculty/burawoy/workingpapers.htm>) But again, there is immense institutional and academic inertia when the goal is the seeming *deterioration* of what the academy is seemingly supposed to do: neutral, scientific, and objective scholarship (see, e.g., Mathieu Deflem’s website, <http://www.savesociology.org/> as a cogent response to such “de-professionalizing” of sociology).

Community studies, on the other hand, is able to bridge and combine both of these issues. It is both academic and engaged. To understand what community studies can offer, though, we must first be able to answer, “what is community studies?” To answer this, though, we must digress for yet one more moment to ask the implicit prior question: “what is community?” And this is where the rubber hits the road.

Or not. In a 1955 paper (Hillery, 1955), in what has come to be seen as the *piece de resistance* of the field in its heyday, George Hillery surveyed ninety-four different definitions of community and found (are you sitting down?) that the only point of commonality was that “all of the definitions deal with people. Beyond this common basis, there is no agreement” (p. 20). Now this is of course somewhat hyperbolic; academics love to make seemingly simple things complex and unmanageable. It allows them to ask more questions and apply for more research funds. But the basic point stands; there is no definitive definition of community.

Having said that, there are in fact some fairly good benchmarks. The progenitor here is Ferdinand Tonnies' 1887 *Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft*, which is usually translated as *Community and Society* (Tonnies, 1957). *Gemeinschaft* is the local, the personal, the intimate, moral certainty. *Gesellschaft*, on the other hand, is the opposite: the large scale, impersonal, economically-based and utilitarian-driven marketplace with no foundational sense of virtue, morality, or home. In a word, Washington D.C.

Bell and Newby (1971) suggest that, “For Tonnies, there are three central aspects of *Gemeinschaft*: blood, place (land), and mind, with their sociological consequents of kinship, neighbourhood and friendship” (p. 25). This trinity of familial bonds, of a bounded geographic locale, and of interest-based relationships is the skeleton key for understanding how communities have been viewed and studied.

From this perspective, then, “community studies” was nothing more nor less than the analysis of individuals' behavior (and the community's impact on such behavior) within these three intertwined spheres. The Lynds' *Middletown*, William Whyte's *Street Corner Society*, and the “Yankee City” project led by W. Lloyd Warner are the emblematic examples here. One may also think of the polar opposite; the studies of *Gessellschaft* such as the classics Whyte's *Ogranization Man* or David Reisman's *The Lonely Crowd*.

But as I alluded to above, such notions of “community” fell into disrepute by the late 1960s and early 1970s. The federal highway system, housing patterns, and affordable transportation; mass media and technology permitting easy communication at great distances. All of these contributed to the notion that this thing called “community” may be more mythic than real. More a straw man than an analytic framework for “real” social scientists. It did not help that the methodology employed by many of these

studies came to be seen as amateurish, overly subjective, and lacking in analytic rigor. “The poor sociologist’s substitute for the novel” is how one critic phrased it (Glass, 1966, p. 148, quoted in Bell and Newby, p. 13).

So with no specific community, community studies has fractured. Today scholars across the humanities and social scientists continue to examine community-based issues through diverse methodological and disciplinary lenses such as network studies, locality studies, community health, urban studies, or community development. While still making use of the tripartite division, such scholars have also sharpened the analytic frame of what constitutes a community: (1) a locality; (2) a “local social system” that refers to a set of social relationships or networks; (3) a type of relationship (Crow, 2000; Day and Murdoch, 1993; Freeland, 2005; Stacey, 1969; Vasta, 2000). Additionally, there are multiple means to frame how one looks at any specific community: communities may be framed as ecological/biological functioning mechanisms; as organizations; as microcosms; and as types (the rural-urban[-metropolis]).

Given this diversity of what constitutes a “community,” I suggest that there are three specific ways to conceptualize community studies: community studies as (a) a methodology (akin to ethnography or community-based research); (b) a pedagogical practice (akin to service-learning); (c) an analytic lens (akin to American Studies or Women’s Studies).

*Community studies as a methodology* is a mode of examining an issue, be it public health or poverty. Community studies in this perspective is one tool on the toolkit of academic scholars engaged in research or analysis. Thus much like an ethnography, statistical analysis, or survey research, community studies is an holistic investigation of how an issue plays out within a community (however defined). A quick search on any academic database (or Google Scholar) turns up numerous studies within the medical and health care fields that take such an approach. Community studies, for these scholars, is a specific empirical procedure that focuses on a specific, bounded, and holistic locale.

*Community studies as a pedagogical practice* is a model of teaching, one that links post-secondary students with their local and global communities. As one community studies center phrases it, “Community Studies means studying and working with communities” (<http://www.naropa.edu/csc/>). This may be thought of as another form of service-learning whereby college students gain insight into their studies through real-world and real-time experiences.

Finally, *community studies as an analytic lens* is a conceptual framework by which to examine an issue. An analogous example would be Women's Studies (see Butin, forthcoming). Thus the community is not simply the object under analysis, but the frame within which one studies an issue. Analogously, Women's Studies scholars would suggest that "women" is not solely the object studied; rather, feminist perspectives inform the analysis of specific issues. From this perspective, one is not simply a historian or sociologist investigating a community-based issue; rather, one is a community studies scholar investigating an issue with historical or sociological import.

This latter option, I would argue, is at the heart of institutionalizing a scholarship of engagement. As I've noted, the rhetoric of a scholarship of engagement are all around us in higher education: on institutional homepages, Presidents' speeches, and in development office presentations. But this emphasis (no matter how well meaning) has only a very loose coupling to the actual policies and practices of the daily life of an institution. Higher education, for better or worse, is a disciplining place. It is about department tenure-track lines, line item budgets, and procedural minutiae.

To return to the example of Women's Studies for a moment: feminist scholars have realized that so long as Women's Studies and feminism was (and is) conflated with social activism, it risks being dismissed as yet another form of identitarian politics beholden to the unquestioned uplifting of an essentialized category (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender). What makes Women's Studies an academic discipline and the gender(ed) subject the mode of inquiry is that its scholarship is able to both look outwards and inwards. Women's Studies can rightly claim to examine an issue (e.g. education, the criminal justice system) through a feminist lens *and* the ability to internally debate and determine what issues are worthy of study, by what modes of inquiry, and to what ends (Weigmann, 1999, 2001, 2002).

This is something that service-learning (or community-based research, the scholarship of teaching and learning movement or any movement under the umbrella of a "scholarship of engagement) cannot do. The only way to institutionalize a culture of engaged pedagogy, of relevant research, of public work, is to discipline it. To make it into an academic program able to determine and debate its own methods, goals, domains of study, and rituals of truth.

So let us now move from the deductive to an inductive perspective. Namely, let us see what community studies actually looks like on the ground in higher education today.

A web-based search was conducted (using Google and Yahoo as the two primary search engines) of the exact phrase “community studies” on any “.edu” domain webpage. After the approximately 100,000 hits (106,000 and 134,000, respectively) were analyzed<sup>1</sup>, exactly twenty-one programs were found that had “community studies” as an academic focus. Table 1 provides an overview. Five concentrations, four minors, three majors, three graduate offerings, and five departments, two of which seemed to be entirely self-standing (UC-Santa Cruz and St. Cloud State University).

An analysis of these twenty-one programs’ self-description (based on their websites) revealed three distinctive “community studies” models: (1) community studies as methodology; (2) community studies as academic specialization; (3) community studies as community development and social change. While many programs spoke of community studies as a methodology, such a methodology appeared primarily to be a precondition for accomplishing either (or both) of the latter two goals. I thus focus on these latter two goals. It is also noteworthy that while several programs clearly articulated both the academic specialization and social change goals, most of the programs fit clearly within a single category. Table 2 provides an overview.

*Community studies as academic specialization* very clearly views community studies as a means to the better understanding and analysis of a specific issue. As Northeastern University’s Urban Affairs & Community Studies concentration states, “This concentration focuses on an analysis of various social issues, social problems, and policy responses that are of particular importance to cities and suburbs” (<http://www.socant.neu.edu/graduate/concentrations/urban/>). Alternatively, *community studies as community development and social change* focuses much more on an activist orientation. As Portland State University’s community studies cluster states:

This cluster explores the nature of the communities we live in, whether defined spatially (such as a neighborhood) or as a set of ties based on sharing a common interest. Building community has become a central debate in a number of social sciences, including sociology, political science, economics, and psychology. In a culture emphasizing individualism and individual rights, how can needs for community and responsibility to others be balanced? *Thus, in this cluster, students have the opportunity to gain practical as well as theoretical experience with building communities.* ([http://www.pdx.edu/unst/sing\\_communitystudies.html](http://www.pdx.edu/unst/sing_communitystudies.html); emphasis added)

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<sup>1</sup> The search results degenerated after the first 1,000 or so hits, i.e. the webpages cited had no obvious relationship to the term “community studies.” It was thus not relevant to analyze every “hit.” Rather, random sampling of “hits” after 1,000 were conducted to insure that such degeneration of results was consistent.

It is important to note, though, that even more “activist” programs are structured within and through traditional academic course content. Students in the Portland State cluster must take a core course entitled, “Community Studies” as well as two other courses from a range of traditional offerings such as “Global Health”, “Economics of Race & Ethnicity”, and “Introduction to Urban Planning.” Thus irrespective of where programs fall on the academic-activist spectrum, all presume that “community studies” is an analytic construct. Such is not the case with research centers. Ten research centers were found through the same search process:

1. Dickinson College's Community Studies Center
2. Elon College's Elon Project for Ethnographic Research and Community Studies
3. Ferris State University's Community Studies Institute
4. Jefferson Community College's Center for Community Studies
5. LaGrange College's Center for Community Studies
6. Loyola Marymount University's Center for the Study of Los Angeles has a programmatic focus on Community Studies
7. Naropa University's Community Studies Center
8. Northeastern University's Center for Urban and Regional Policy
9. University of Colorado at Boulder's INVST Community Studies
10. Vanderbilt University's Center for Community Studies

A review of these centers' descriptions and mission statements revealed that the primary focus was either on methodology or pedagogy. Methodologically, such centers either promoted a decidedly ethnographic focus (e.g. Dickinson, Elon) or a policy focus on local and regional community issues (e.g. LaGrange, Vanderbilt). Dickinson's Community Studies Center, for example, states that “The Community Studies Center at Dickinson was developed 5 years ago as an effort to support and extend faculty-student fieldwork, including ethnography, participant-observation and oral history” (<http://www.dickinson.edu/external/departments/commstud/csLibArts.htm>). Vanderbilt's Center, alternatively, focuses on “research, dissemination, outreach and capacity-building components” (<http://peabody.vanderbilt.edu:16080/ccs/>). Several of the centers (e.g. Naropa, University of Colorado) focused on community studies as a pedagogical practice to support students' engagement with local communities and community issues. The University of Colorado-Boulder's INVST mission statement, for example, states that, “Our programs develop engaged citizens and leaders who work for the benefit of humanity and the environment” (<http://www.colorado.edu/communitystudies/index.html>).

So to return to the big picture: what we have are about two dozen academic programs and a dozen research centers scattered haphazardly around the country all employing the “community studies”

moniker. All of the academic programs are traditionally structured as concentrations, minors, or majors, with programs ranging on a spectrum of academic-activist orientations. All of the research centers, on the other hand, focus on community studies as a methodological or pedagogical practice.

To thus conclude, let me return to the initial goal. If the goal is to institutionalize a scholarship of engagement, then neither making service-learning more academic nor academic programs more activist is the answer. Nor is it simply developing stand-alone research centers. Rather, one must begin to think through how community studies can become an academic program. And as such, it is thinking about how to institutionalize a discipline. That is what this session is about and I am hopeful that our panelist and you as audience members can help add more meat to the bones I have laid out. Thank you very much. I would now like to turn the presentation over to my colleagues.

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Table 1. Community Studies academic programs in higher education

<b><u>Concentrations</u></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• California State University - Northridge's Asian American Studies department offers a Community Studies concentration</li> <li>• Clemson's Sociology department offers a Community Studies concentration</li> <li>• George Mason University's New Century College offers a Community Studies concentration</li> <li>• Guilford College offers a Community Studies concentration within their Justice and Policy Studies major</li> <li>• Portland State University offers a Community Studies cluster within their University Studies program</li> <li>• University of Missouri-Columbia's Department of Rural Sociology has a Community Studies emphasis</li> </ul>
<b><u>Minor</u></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ferris State University offers a Community Studies minor</li> <li>• Santa Clara University offers a Community Studies minor</li> <li>• University of Michigan's College of Literature, Science, and the Arts offers an Urban and Community Studies minor</li> <li>• Washington State University's Community &amp; Rural Sociology Department offers a Community Studies minor</li> </ul>
<b><u>Major</u></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• University of Baltimore offers a Community Studies and Civic Engagement major</li> <li>• University of Massachusetts - Boston's College of Public &amp; Community Service offers a Community Studies major</li> <li>• University of Utah's Department of Family &amp; Consumer Studies offers a Consumer &amp; Community Studies major</li> </ul>
<b><u>Graduate offering</u></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Northeastern University's department of Sociology &amp; Anthropology offers an Urban Affairs &amp; Community Studies concentration for its graduate program</li> <li>• University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign's Department of Human and Community Development offers a Community Studies and Outreach PhD program</li> <li>• University of Vermont offers a graduate program in Education and Community Studies</li> </ul>
<b><u>Department</u></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• St. Cloud State University has a Community Studies department</li> <li>• University of California -Santa Cruz has a Community Studies department</li> <li>• University of Connecticut has an Urban and Community Studies department</li> <li>• University of Maine-Machias offers a Behavioral Sciences &amp; Community Studies major</li> <li>• University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee has a department of Educational Policy &amp; Community Studies</li> </ul>

Table 2. Community Studies models

<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Community Studies as academic specialization</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clemson's Sociology department offers a Community Studies concentration</li> <li>• California State University - Northridge's Asian American Studies department offers a Community Studies concentration</li> <li>• University of Connecticut has an Urban and Community Studies department</li> <li>• Ferris State University offers a Community Studies minor</li> <li>• University of Michigan's College of Literature, Science, and the Arts offers an Urban and Community Studies minor</li> <li>• Northeastern University's department of Sociology &amp; Anthropology offers an Urban Affairs &amp; Community Studies concentration for its graduate program</li> <li>• University of Maine-Machias offers a Behavioral Sciences &amp; Community Studies major</li> <li>• University of Missouri-Columbia's Department of Rural Sociology has a Community Studies emphasis</li> <li>• University of Utah's Department of Family &amp; Consumer Studies offers a Consumer &amp; Community Studies major</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Community Studies as community development and social change</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guilford College offers a Community Studies concentration within their Justice and Policy Studies major</li> <li>• Portland State University offers a Community Studies cluster within their University Studies program</li> <li>• St. Cloud State University has a Community Studies department</li> <li>• Santa Clara University offers a Community Studies minor</li> <li>• University of Baltimore offers a Community Studies and Civic Engagement major</li> <li>• University of Vermont offers a graduate program in Education and Community Studies</li> <li>• University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee has a department of Educational Policy &amp; Community Studies</li> <li>• Washington State University's Community &amp; Rural Sociology Department offers a Community Studies minor</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Both academic specialization and social change</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• George Mason University's New Century College offers a Community Studies concentration</li> <li>• University of California -Santa Cruz has a Community Studies department</li> <li>• University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign's Department of Human and Community Development offers a Community Studies and Outreach PhD program</li> <li>• University of Massachusetts - Boston's College of Public &amp; Community Service offers a Community Studies major</li> </ul>