

Public Scholarship:

What is it and how do I integrate it into my curriculum?

Context and Key Issues

Universities are increasingly being urged to demonstrate their relevance and contribution to finding solutions to pressing social, civic, economic and moral problems. Public scholarship, which has been defined as the engagement of students in authentic and meaningful learning experiences that integrate research, teaching/learning and community engagement (Academic Plan 3), provides a means of responding to this challenge.

Public scholarship involves engaging with communities outside the university as part of the learning process. It is characterised by a process of reciprocal engagement and mutual collaboration that benefits students, academics and the external agencies with which they interact. It enables students and staff to engage effectively with community problems by building reciprocal connections between their university learning and local and global problems.

Public scholarship has the potential to enhance student learning. It is a form of research-based learning (RBL) that facilitates stronger integration of staff and student research and learning into the lives of communities beyond the university. It provides a means of linking RBL, work-integrated learning (WIL), blended learning and internationalisation in a holistic way that crosses disciplinary boundaries.

Benefits of public scholarship

For students:

- Increases the relevance of student's learning and disciplinary knowledge by moving RBL into real-world settings
 - curriculum design and assessment tasks encourage students to apply and interpret the theories and research underpinning their discipline in the context of real-world problems
 - creates opportunities for students to learn from experts in the field
- Encourages students to:
 - discover new knowledge, conduct their own research projects and bring their learning back into the classroom to facilitate knowledge exchange between the university and the community;
 - produce work of a very high standard through authentic tasks with real-world consequences;
 - develop social responsibility and leadership; and
 - see their lecturers as scholars who apply their expertise in real-world settings.
- Enhances employability by: preparing students to address social problems; allowing them to explore career goals; and assisting them to build a strong resume.

For academics:

- Increases the likelihood of accomplishing multiple scholarship goals simultaneously, improving their overall efficiency and effectiveness. Academic work is reframed as a unified whole drawing together the activities of research, teaching, leadership and service (Colbeck & Michael, 2006)
- Creates opportunities for meaningful scholarly activity that generates new knowledge through collaboration with community groups in response to community issues
- Generates applied research projects and journal articles that contribute evidence-based solutions to real world issues
- Increases impact of research through contributions to improved policy and practice
- Provides opportunities to increase the relevance of course content
- Enhances career prospects through increased funding sources and grant opportunities for community projects and increased access to information

The following strategies provide a guide for engaging in public scholarship. Some suggestions are more appropriate in some disciplines than others. They give a range of options that will be most effective if tailored to your particular context.

Strategies for engaging in public scholarship and for integrating public scholarship in your curricula

1. Look for ways to reframe your teaching, work-integrated learning; research and community engagement as public scholarship
 - Examine your research-based learning; work-integrated learning; community engagement activities; and current research projects. To what extent do they encompass public scholarship principles?
 - Could you align your research, teaching and community engagement activities more closely? For example:
 - Is there a way you might involve students in data collection for your community-based research projects?
 - Could you revise a research assignment to involve an authentic community partnership?
 - Are there opportunities for community-based research projects when students are undertaking WIL or 'social enterprise' activities?
 - Can you reframe a research project that involves gathering data from members of the wider community so that it involves genuine partnership with a community group?
2. Look for opportunities to provide a 'real world' context for both theoretical concepts covered in the curriculum and your own research activities
 - Is there a relationship between your own research and 'real world' research issues?
 - Is it possible to use community issues as a starting point for accomplishing educational goals?
 - Are there ways you can design curricula to link learning and the community?
 - Is it possible to get students to work on a research issue identified by community partners, under your supervision, as part of their course work? (It is important to ensure that the choice of a 'real world' issue is manageable in terms of designing learning, teaching and assessment activities.)
3. Incorporate research-based learning into work-integrated learning placements
 - Consider the nature and scope of both WIL and RBL components and the interfaces between the two. Can you give students and community/industry supervisors the option of engaging in a research project while they are on work placement?
 - Can you redesign a WIL assessment task to incorporate a research project? (You will need to consider what support supervisors will need and how you will provide this.)
4. Look for opportunities to involve community/industry stakeholders in on-campus research-based teaching and learning
 - Invite key community stakeholders to attend a student conference showcasing students' research projects
 - Develop a research assignment based on interviewing professionals
 - Seek input from disciplinary professionals on key issues/needs in preparing students to enter the workforce and use this input to inform curriculum
5. Look for opportunities to develop & sustain community partnerships
 - Develop a consistent way to document and disseminate outcomes so that they can be shared with interested external communities and with students, where appropriate.
 - Invest time to build understanding of community needs (Holland, 2004)
 - Involve community members in your research projects from the start
 - Only enter into community projects that will enhance student learning
6. Consider opportunities for enhancing your scholarship and professional development
 - Realigning your epistemological assumptions about knowledge and learning styles to include public scholarship approaches may provide broader opportunities for scholarship
 - Take advantage of professional development opportunities, such as the Scholarship of Learning and Teaching Community of Practice, to share ideas
 - Look for opportunities to publish the results of your public scholarship activities

Acknowledgements:

Context and benefits drawn from a range of sources including:

Colbeck, C. & Wharton, Michael, P. (2006). The public scholarship: Reintegrating Boyer's four domains. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 129, 7-19.

Holland, B. (2004). *Community partners as educational collaborators*. Retrieved September 15, 2008 from the California State University website: http://www.calstate.edu/csl/resource_center/documents/CSL_CoEducatorsBooklet-07.pdf

Strategies developed from interviews with Griffith academics demonstrating good practice in public scholarship.