

# Community Engagement in the Liberal Arts

Academic Dispositions, Institutional Dilemmas

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# CERTS in the context of postsecondary institutions

*too often the rhetoric of community engagement outpaces the reality* (Butin 2007: 34)

- Ideological and Institutional Tensions around CERTS in Postsecondaries: increased compartmentalization and downloading of work, mismatch between rhetoric and reward, increased power of external (funding) agencies to shape agendas, potential flattening of disciplinary differences (Diamond and Adam 1995; Colbeck and Wharton-Michael 2006)
- CERTS dilemmas in the Liberal Arts, especially in the Public University: disciplinary differences in definitions of scholarship, differing relations (& hierarchies) of theory and practice, strong critical traditions amid strong pressure to demonstrate “what good are we” (Giroux 2011; Denning 2005)

NOTE: **CERTS** = Community Engaged Research, Teaching, & Service

# context of the study



- Large Canadian public research university
- Faculty of Arts includes humanities, social sciences, fine & performing arts

## AIMS OF ACES

*(Arts Community Engagement Study, University of Alberta)*

- To understand existing practices, aims, and concepts of engaged work in the Faculty
- To explore the possibilities and challenges inherent to academic teaching and research in Arts that engage the greater community

# methods

- two preliminary focus groups
- online survey (both closed- and **open-ended questions**) of all faculty and .66+ contract instructors: 115 respondents
- **12 in-depth interviews** with willing survey participants

# snapshot of participants

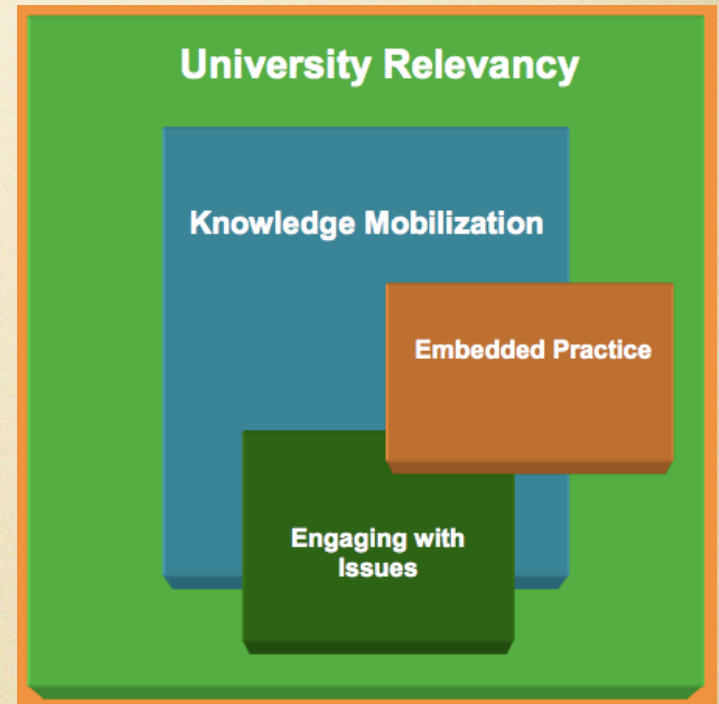
Respondents chose <b>all</b> areas that apply	Humanities	Fine Arts	Social Sciences	Interdisciplinary Studies
	44%	24%	54%	26%

77/115 respondents identified	Contract Instructor	Professor	Associate Professor	Assistant Professor
	23	30	11	13

- 60% said CET was important, 50% reported activity in last 3 years
- 65% said CER was important, 55% reported activity in last 3 years
- 70% said CES was important, 75% reported activity in last 3 years

# Open-ended Survey Questions Selected for Coding

- In general, how would you define community engagement?
- Why is community engagement part of your academic practice?
- What is your response to having “community engagement” form part of the University and Faculty of Arts academic plans?



# disposition

a tendency to think or act in a particular way...a habitual inclination

- **Locus of Knowledge**

J Jointly produced ↔ U University-based

- **Role of the Academic**

NF Networker-Facilitator ↔ KP Knowledge Producer

- **View of Community**

(General Public, Specific Orgs, Research/Practice Networks, etc.)

- **Sense of Agency relative to (the changing) institution**

# gender, rank, years, discipline

## survey statistics

- females more likely to report involvement in community-engaged service
- associate and full profs most likely to report CERTS
- 15+ years at university more likely to report CERTS
- fine arts more likely to have done CER&T; social science to have done CER (compared to humanities)

## qualitative coding: dispositions

- females tend toward shared knowledge model: J + NF
- assoc profs tend toward shared knowledge model; full profs polarized (J + NF v. U + KP)
- those at the institution 20+ years most positive, least cynical
- fine arts has clearest pattern (J + NF); soc sci and humanities most cynical...

...BUT there's more to the story



# Mickey & David

...full professors in the same social sciences department (coded U + KP)...

THEY BOTH...

- see CE as a responsibility & *public mandate*
- locate it under *service* (not research or teaching)
- locate knowledge mostly in *the University*
- see the engaged academic as *sharing expertise*

BUT...

...for Mickey, engagement pulls out into community, brings community into university, and “assists in solving particular problems or for particular groups”

...for David, engagement is “mostly uni-directional,” and is about “providing advice”

# Carl & Renata

...assistant professors in the same humanities department (NF)...

THEY BOTH...

- see CE as *going out* to engage *non-academic publics*
- see the engaged academic as a *translator, inciter*
- locate knowledge in *multiple arenas*
- give value to integration of CE in *research & teaching*

BUT...

...Carl sees engaged work as not well enough supported or rewarded, so he is reluctant to more fully integrate

...Renata sees engagement as necessary and integral, especially with Arts “under attack”

# (healthy) skepticism from participants toward...

...Institutional mandate to engage

- problem: top-down, standardized definition of CE
- problem: weak concept of CE
- problem: lack of infrastructure to support CE

...Rewards system

- problem: recognition of local but not int'l CE
- problem: rewarding activism rather than scholarship
- problem: inability to reward fully-integrated CE

*Pragmatic push for engagement in Arts seen as both a  
problem and an opportunity...*

# boundary-spanning challenges

- Interdisciplinarity highly correlated with engagement: *how do we move from individual InterD identity to community-focused InterD collaborations?*
- Integration of CE across R&T is happening but limited (in support): *how do we create infrastructures for its many faces and models?*
- Institutionalization is a mixed bag: *how might flexible dispositions shape it?*