Valuing and Supporting Community-Engaged Scholarship in SE&IS

Introduction

UCLA's Council on Academic Personnel (CAP) has issued guidance inviting faculty, should they choose, to include evidence of community-engaged scholarship as part of the university review process for personnel actions. This memo aims to inform UCLA SE&IS faculty as they prepare materials for their own reviews and as they consider the work of their colleagues.

The memo presents a set of questions to help SE&IS faculty reflect on the process and products of community-engaged scholarship and why and how this matters. Ideally, such reflection will help faculty to understand and communicate the value of their community-engaged scholarship and how these efforts relate to their broader program of work.

Faculty may wish to articulate how they define and enact community-engaged scholarship in their self-statement. As is the case generally, in reporting on community-engaged scholarship, it is the responsibility of faculty to convey what they have done, why this is important, and how this relates to their scholarly project.

In preparing materials for review, faculty may designate the results of community-engaged scholarship with a [CE] in bibliographic entries, and they similarly may designate particular courses they teach, or professional activities they have undertaken, with a [CE]. (See related optional instructions for guidance.)

Including community-engaged scholarship in the academic review process

Acknowledging the importance of community-engaged scholarship, UCLA's Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost's office recently called for divisions and schools to establish criteria to evaluate the excellence and impact of such scholarship in relationship to their particular disciplines and areas of professional work.[1]

According to CAP, community-engaged scholarship "includes research or scholarship conducted in partnership with non-academic organizations and community scholars and practitioners. Such partnerships create opportunities for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources that make a positive contribution to both our university and to the public good and align well with our university's mission."[2]

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[1] This directive followed the recommendation of a 2021 report from UCLA's Center for Community Engagement. See: https://communityengagement.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Tenure-and-Promotion-Policy-for-Engaged-Scholarship-Report-10_12_21.pdf

[2] UCLA Academic Senate. (2024). CAP Guidance: Community-Engaged Scholarship. https://senate.ucla.edu/committee/cap/guidance/community-engaged-scholarship

At SE&IS, we value and aim to support community-engaged scholarship that reflects the unique disciplinary and practice concerns of education and information studies and that advances our shared goals as a school.

What are the purpose and forms of community-engaged scholarship in SE&IS?

Community-engaged scholarship in SE&IS serves many purposes. It supports learning, professional practice, policy development, judicial deliberation, legal or political advocacy, and participation of youth and community members in research. It illuminates problems of practice or issues of concern to communities, particularly issues related to learning and access to information. And it documents and exhibits stories, texts, and information that hold great value to communities and deepen shared understandings of historical and contemporary struggles for justice.

There are many possible products of community-engaged scholarship: research reports, policy briefs, case studies, program evaluations, legal declarations, model policies or legislation, professional standards, curricular materials, tools to support learning and guide organizations, rubrics for professional practice, toolkits for library and archive collections, digital collections, preservation projects, documentary films, oral histories, testimonials, historic tours, and more.

Reflection questions for community-engaged scholars in SE&IS
–What purpose(s) did your project seek to advance?
–Why was it important for you to advance these purposes through community-engaged scholarship?
–Why did you choose this product to share or represent your work?

Who are our community engagement partners and how do SE&IS scholars collaborate with them?

As expressed in our school's draft strategic plan, SE&IS values community-engaged scholarship that forges relationships with a wide range of community partners, including, for example, reservation tribal governments. A particularly important set of partners are our students and our alumni who are professionals (or professionals in training) working in schools, colleges, non-profit organizations, advocacy groups, public libraries, archives, arts organizations, museums, and related settings. Generally, we aim to "learn with and from youth, community partners, information specialists, educators and scholars from across the globe." Partnerships may take many forms, such as, research-practice partnerships, participatory action research partnerships, community-design partnerships. Partners may participate in various phases of the scholarly project, from problem definition, to investigation, to sense-making, to sharing new insights and information. Community-engaged scholarship in SE&IS aims to involve such partners in "learning, inquiry, and dialogue about education, information, [and] community well-being."[3]

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[3] UCLA SE&IS Draft Strategic Plan, 2024-2028.

Reflection questions for community-engaged scholars in SE&IS
—When and how did you establish a relationship with your community partner? How have you sustained this relationship over time?
—To what extent have community partners had a meaningful opportunity to shape the purpose, direction, and ultimate forms of expression of the collaborative project?

What values inform and motivate the process and aims of community-engaged scholarship in SE&IS?

As noted above, CAP acknowledges that community-engaged scholarship must be "mutually beneficial"—that is, the collaboration must be of value to both university-based scholars and their community partners. The Carnegie Foundation takes this idea a step further, asserting that collaboration also must be "undertaken in a context of partnership and reciprocity." [4] This additional language points toward a recognition that scholars need to grapple with issues of power and relationality as they enter into and build collaborations with community partners. In this sense, university-based scholars must take care that their collaborative work is not extractive or exploitative. The SE&IS strategic plan elaborates on and extends these commitments. It speaks of "democratiz[ing] information, knowledge, research, and practice" and "foster[ing] collaborative and trusting relationships in which the histories, expertise, and wisdom of all partners are affirmed." [5]

While the aims of any particular community-engaged scholarship project necessarily emerge from the needs and concerns of community partners, the collaborative efforts may well also connect to a broader agenda for advancing social justice and the well-being of our planet. Community-engaged scholarship should broaden the range of voices heard in critical deliberations about education and information, and it should expand access to valued learning and information resources. Ideally, it should make a difference in how power is enacted and distributed, particularly in institutions and organizations dedicated to learning and sharing information.

Reflection questions for community-engaged scholars in SE&IS
—How and in what ways has your collaboration drawn upon the histories, expertise, and wisdom of your partners?
—How and in what ways have you explored and or negotiated issues of power and purpose with your partners?

What evidence should SE&IS use to evaluate the quality and impact of community-engaged scholarship?

Any assessment of community-engaged scholarship must attend to both the process and products of the collaboration. Hence, part of the evidence regarding the quality of such scholarship will

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[4] Carnegie Foundation. (2022). The Elective Classification for Community Engagement.
https://carnegieclassifications.acenet.edu/elective-classifications/community-engagement/
[5] UCLA SE&IS Draft Strategic Plan, 2024-2028.

emerge from the responses of SE&IS faculty to the reflective questions about community-engaged scholarship articulated above. In addition, partners should be invited to share their own accounts of how they experienced the collaboration and how it benefited them. Partners may wish to consider whether, and to what extent, the community-engaged scholarship: a) Provided them with ways to share important stories or information; b) Enhanced their practice; c) Informed or amplified their advocacy; and/or d) Deepened their social change efforts.

Scholars also may present other evidence about the impact of the collaboration. They may include documentation of where and how the products of community-engaged scholarship are used. If appropriate, they may note the scale and/or reach of the work and why and how this matters. In addition, scholars may include awards, formal acknowledgments, or other forms of recognition for this work.

Reflection questions for community-engaged scholars in SE&IS
–How, if at all, has your community-engaged scholarship benefited your partner, for example, by broadening access to important stories or information, enhancing practice, informing advocacy, or influencing social change efforts?
–How, if at all, has your community-engaged scholarship broadened the range of voices heard in critical deliberations about education and information and/or expanded access to valued learning and information resources?
–What have you learned through this work, and how will it inform your scholarship and your teaching in the future?