



Creating Citizens: Liberal Arts, Civic Engagement, and the Land-Grant Tradition

Brunner, Brigitta R.
University of Alabama Press, 2016

Book Review

Tags: civic engagement | engaged learning | student learning outcomes

Reviewed by: Jeffrey Brackett

Date Reviewed: January 25, 2018

Using examples of community and civic engagement (CCE) at Auburn University, this collection of essays provides readers with a lens through which to view a number of debates in higher education. In the broadest sense, the essays address the question of the role of higher education. More narrowly, they ask questions such as, how do universities respond to increasing public pressure to demonstrate clear connections between education and job placement? Since the volume focuses on civic engagement, authors ask what the ideal relationship between a university and its surrounding community might be. How, for example, does a public university foster such relationships, of what sort, and to what end? With increasing pressure on students to graduate in four years, along with widespread perceptions of higher education as a form of job-specific training, it may seem rather bold for educators to promote a liberal arts education. However, Brunner argues that one can address these questions by looking to the ancient Greek and Roman liberal arts models, which “foster personal growth and civic participation” (1).

Through diverse case studies, the authors illustrate the high impact learning experiences that occur in CCE situations. For example, students in political science who do internships have a higher degree of satisfaction with the course, learn nuances about relationships between theory and problem-solving in a community, and often reconsider their career choices. This reconsideration results, in part, from the reflective component of CCE, which helps students make connections between classroom learning and their internships via writing assignments. These connections further illustrate the critical thinking (among other skills) that liberal arts education fosters – skills which align with employers’ desires in hiring.

While much of *Creating Citizens* focuses on teaching and student-learning outcomes, Brunner also addresses the contentious issue of how promotion and tenure committees are to evaluate the work of engaged scholarship. How, for instance, does engaged scholarship measure up to traditional peer-reviewed scholarship? Again, this is not a new question, but one that nevertheless impacts pre-tenured faculty decisions for research plans. Brunner notes that engaged scholarship combines teaching and service, is as rigorous as other peer-reviewed scholarship, and upholds university missions and values by engaging faculty in mutually-beneficial, community-based problem-solving. In short, students, faculty, the university, and the community all benefit from CCE.

Readers may wonder how the final essay fits within this volume; though interesting as a reflection on the role of non-native activist anthropologists working in India, the connection to the thematic foci of the other essays is tenuous. Overall, however, this volume would be of interest to educators looking for practical models of CCE that can be adapted to fit one's own institutional location, mission, values, and vision for community relations. Land-grant institutions such as Auburn explicitly aim to promote application of research, in this case through CCE, a model that any institution of higher education would do well to consider adopting.

https://wabashcenter.wabash.edu/resources/book_reviews/creating-citizens-liberal-arts-civic-engagement-and-the-land-grant-tradition/