

# **Editorial: The engaged university**

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Welcome to the 10-year anniversary issue of *Gateways*. The two collaborative university-community research centres that founded the journal – Shopfront at the University of Technology Sydney and the Center for Urban Research and Learning (CURL) at Loyola University Chicago – celebrated their respective 20th anniversaries in the past two years. It seems counterintuitive that two local, community-engaged centres would establish an international journal. However, from the beginning, our centres and the journal have recognised the importance of breaking down boundaries in producing and sharing knowledge.

One boundary has been the university-community divide, which *Gateways* and its contributors have striven to overcome. We have been part of a movement. Lawrence S. Bacow, who was Chair of the Steering Committee of the international Tallories Network, which promotes university engagement, has noted positively of this trend:

*In universities around the world, something extraordinary is underway. Mobilizing their human and intellectual resources, institutions of higher education are directly tackling community problems – combating poverty, improving public health, and restoring environmental quality. Brick by brick around the world, the engaged university is replacing the ivory tower (Bacow 2011).*

Another boundary has been the national border divide. The more we have engaged in rigorous community-engaged research, the more we have recognised the need to share this information and connect researchers, community leaders and activists across the globe.

Increased access to evolving communication technologies internationally have made it easier and more affordable for local researchers to communicate from one continent to another. In past decades, international work could only be effectively done through a larger national or international intermediary organisation. Today, the dramatically increased accessibility to, and lower costs of, international communications to broad sectors of the population has facilitated direct, local-to-local communications. Sharing information via the internet and by global video-

conferencing is an everyday occurrence now. Free e-journals such as *Gateways* can reach an international community of scholars, practitioners and grassroots activists easily in ways that traditional academic publications can not. In addition to just reporting on participatory research, journal articles can produce direct links among members of this growing community. The journal and its supportive network of universities and community partners can also stimulate new ideas and seed new projects.

We cannot overemphasise the importance of the support from our respective universities in making the first 10 years of *Gateways* a success. This support first started with the creation of Shopfront and CURL. Twenty years ago, the University of Technology Sydney and Loyola University Chicago each supported research centres that were committed to including community partners as active participants in research – providing ‘chairs’ for them at the ‘research table’ where new ideas emerge, and where research gets designed, coordinated and published. Previously reserved for credentialled academics, Shopfront and CURL changed the rules and invited equally knowledgeable community members to the table. It was a bold move to recognise the value of combining university knowledge and community knowledge, and the centres continue to do so in an evolving environment. In their discussion of what we would call the final stage of the corporatisation of the tertiary sector – and what Slaughter & Rhoades (2009) called ‘academic capitalism’ – Munck et al. (2014) have rightly observed:

*Higher education internationally is currently facing a funding crisis and a crisis of perspectives. There is an increasing turn toward what we might call the commercialization or commodification of knowledge.*

*The turn toward the community or the discovery of a third mission alongside teaching and research may provide an alternative strategy for higher education, which might help it to better fulfil its role as a public good.*

Secondly, through their encouragement of Shopfront and CURL and some additional financial and technical support for the journal, the two universities deserve credit. UTS ePRESS provided the platform on which to build *Gateways*. In addition to Paul Ashton’s experience as editor of *Public History Review*, the press provided a well-designed system for soliciting, reviewing and editing articles. The centres, supplemented by their respective universities, also provided the necessary financial support for editorial staff of an e-journal committed to free access to users in all countries.

The third form of support came not only from our universities, but every universities connected with the scholars, local research projects and community partners associated with the articles published in *Gateways* over 10 volumes. *Gateways* authors and their research teams are front-door entry points to

longstanding international networks. Universities themselves, including the scores of disciplines and sub-disciplines, have very impressive national and international networks. Whether through an institution's various discipline-based associations, annual conferences or annual journals, academic-to-academic networks are central to furthering knowledge within scholarly networks. *Gateways* authors bring a variety of ties to these international networks. Community partner co-authors also bring ties to national and international networks of non-government organisations, government policy-makers and activists.

In the 2008 inaugural issue of *Gateways*, we promised to 'fill a gap created by the sparse number of journals which publish outcomes of community-engaged research and work concerning community engagement' (Nyden et al. 2008). We have succeeded by many measures, and we continue to grow. In 2016 we had over 10 000 readers from 85 countries. Measured by number of visits to the *Gateways* website, our readers' top-ten home countries are Australia, United States, Canada, United Kingdom, Kenya, India, South Africa, Malaysia, the Philippines and Indonesia. *Gateways* articles are actively used by our readers. Almost 23 000 articles were downloaded in 2016, a 22-fold increase from the 1075 downloads just four years earlier in 2012. The journal has also established a foothold among academic users. In 2013, there were 233 citations of *Gateways* articles in other academic publications; this grew to 475 in 2015. Due to a two-year lag in the article publication/citation process, our download figures imply that these citations are likely to increase dramatically in the next year or two.

On the one hand, the numbers are a confirmation of our journal's reach to a larger international readership. On the other hand, we know that *Gateways* articles are actively used by both researchers and practitioners/activists to understand and further their work. We have succeeded in becoming a go-to source of information for grassroots activities across the globe. *Gateways* has become an evidence-based global forum. Not only are community members at the 'research table', but the community itself has become large, multi-faceted and international.

*Gateways* has become a valuable link in a worldwide network that supports change-oriented participatory research in thousands of local communities. And, like culture, all of these activities are fundamentally local (Andersen & Malone 2013). The journal has also made a major step in connecting the local to the global. Participatory research has been criticised as being parochial, with only limited value to broader audiences. This critique can be debated, or debunked, as it has, for example, by Randy Stoecker (2011). *Gateways* has shone a light on local research and its connection to international issues. It is a resource to all readers, but also provides encouragement to collaborative university-community research teams. This affirms to grassroots activists that they are not disconnected from 'bigger' global issues; rather, they are very much a critical part of a growing global movement.

*Gateways* has provided increasing support and visibility for academics who often find themselves swimming against the stream of the academic practice favouring discipline-determined research priorities and de-valuing research specifically aimed at improving the quality of life in local communities. Two years ago, the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, the 'newspaper' of US higher education, published a lead article, 'When activism is worth the risk', highlighting the community-based work of a few individual scholars around the country (Williams June 2015). The author praised the individual activist scholars in succeeding in the balancing act of scholarship and activism. At the same time, the article implicitly perpetuated the notion that this kind of work is marginal. Collaborative research centres and journals such as *Gateways* are needed to counter this marginalisation. In a response to the *Chronicle*, Phil Nyden (2015) stated:

*we should not let departments, universities, and scholarly associations off the hook in their role in perpetuating the risks to creative scholars who are addressing broader societal inequities. The tensions between activism and scholarship have structural foundations in our universities and scholarly associations.*

*Rather than couching this in terms of a tightrope that individual activist academics must walk, universities need to change. The gold-standard of scholarship should not just be how it is judged in contributing to the discipline, but [also on] what impact it has on the quality of life of people and communities outside the universities – as measured by input from those communities. Rather than occasionally recognizing and cheering on activist academic tightrope walkers from the sidelines, universities need to establish support systems for those scholars.*

*Gateways* is now a strong part of that support system, making community-engaged research less marginal and more central in the lives of both academics and community members.

By publishing community-engaged research articles and discussing participatory research methodologies, *Gateways* plays a role in familiarising and bringing community eyes, ears and voices into the research process. Building new community-based proponents of scientific, evidence-based, rigorous research projects will be critical in a world where prominent forces are attacking science. Anyone doing any kind of research today finds it hard to ignore the insidious forces of anti-science and anti-intellectualism. In the US, President Trump has become a leader of these forces with his slash-and-burn tactics working to dismantle long-established government programs – many of which were designed and built on foundations of rigorous research in areas such as affordable housing, environmental protection, child poverty reduction, education and healthcare. Similar forces dismissing rigorous, systematic research have gained a foothold already and are strengthening around the globe.

Science – particularly the activist, community-engaged, change-oriented science produced by participatory research – has long been attacked. Anti-science and anti-intellectual views have been longstanding traditions among parts of American society. Over 30 years ago, well-known science fiction writer Isaac Asimov (1980) wrote:

*There is a cult of ignorance in the United States, and there has always been. The strain of anti-intellectualism has been a constant thread winding its way through our political and cultural life, nurtured by the false notion that democracy means that my ignorance is just as good as your knowledge.*

This 'anti-sciencism' is not merely part of a conservative ideology; it is a reaction against independent thinking and independent research that often questions the status quo. Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Richard Hofstadter observed in *Anti-intellectualism in American life* (1963) that 'intellect is dangerous. Left free, there is nothing it will not reconsider, analyze, throw into question'.

Community-engaged research, which lies at the heart of *Gateways*, is a powerful antidote to the cult of ignorance and anti-science know-nothingism. The collaborative university-community research process that is so much a part of many of *Gateways'* articles increases community awareness of, and participation in, the systematic, evidence-based process of scientific research. Community partners in research become increasingly familiar with components of research, from research design and data-gathering to the writing of results and dissemination of findings to broader audiences. In the process, community knowledge can be more systematically gathered and analysed – whether it is the collection of survey data by community resident/university researcher teams or the accumulation of oral histories that are shared with broader audiences and give voice to community members. Community members become partners in science and, in the process, advocates for systematic research that can lift the veils that hide community processes and institutional practices that perpetuate inequities in local communities. It is also a remedy to a dilemma currently facing academia.

Tertiary institutions have been under increasing pressure for some time to achieve competing goals. Universities in countries such as Australia, Britain and New Zealand, which have undergone national research assessment processes (with grave consequences in the case of Britain) are expected to publish ever larger quantities of original research in 'high-quality' academic venues, primarily elite and often expensive academic journals, and to demonstrate peer esteem. At the same time, they are required to demonstrate relevance, impact and social benefit. Outside universities, state-based services continue to be eroded in difficult economic circumstances, while resources for community groups continue to shrink. The modern university personified has become a kind of Dr Jekyll writ large. As Geoffrey Boulton (2009) noted:

*In the last two decades, higher education worldwide has moved from the periphery to the centre of governmental agendas. Universities are now seen as crucial national assets in addressing many policy priorities, and as: sources of new knowledge and innovative thinking; providers of skilled personnel and credible credentials; contributors to innovation; attractors of international talent and business investment; agents of social justice and mobility; contributors to social and cultural vitality; and determinants of health and well-being.*

Gateways has been a place where university researchers and community members join together to better understand the broad range of issues confronting communities across the globe, including academic communities. It is well positioned to promote a healthy debate among community members, researchers and policy-makers around scores of problems. We will continue to be a resource that is free to the thousands of our readers. And, yes, we do hope that the research outcomes published in *Gateways* will throw outdated ideas into question and be seen as dangerous to some.

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