Northwestern

BUFFETT INSTITUTE
FOR **GLOBAL STUDIES**
Community-Engaged Scholarship
Working Group

Principles of Ethical Practice for Community-Engaged Learning, Research and Service

Across its many schools, centers, and programs, Northwestern University has long demonstrated a substantial commitment to community-engaged forms of scholarship. "Community-engaged scholarship" is a broad, flexible term that loosely encompasses activities ranging from research and civic engagement to service learning. CES reflects a common focus on the public purpose of higher education, putting the substantial human, academic, technical, and financial resources of the University in the service of addressing critical human challenges.

In recent years, it has become apparent that opportunities to contribute to forms of community-engaged scholarship have grown in number, complexity, and risk, both at Northwestern University and across peer institutions.[1] Undergraduate students, for example, are increasingly exhorted to conduct independent research and service projects on an international scale, placing increasing demands on University resources and underscoring the indispensability of (1) clear, shared guidelines for ethically and methodologically sound practice, and (2) strong mechanisms for accountability to community partners, relevant stakeholders, and vulnerable populations.

In our current moment of global transformation and uncertainty, the responsibility of institutions of research and higher education to serve and defend the public good is all the more salient and urgent. By articulating a shared vision and set of values for the role of Northwestern University in addressing the major challenges faced by today's societies, the Buffett Institute's Community-Engaged Scholarship (CES) Working Group has aimed to foster and support a community of practice committed to ethical, equitable, and effective scholarship as a vital form of public service.

To this end, we propose the following, non-comprehensive list of key principles[2] for ethical and equitable approaches to community-engaged learning, research and service at Northwestern.

1. Above all else, <u>do no harm</u>. This encompasses:

    -   Ethical guidelines and their enforcement, e.g., via Institutional Review Board and other processes for vetting community-engaged learning, research and service projects
    -   Compliance with local laws and following safety and liability requirements of community partners
    -   Careful safety and risk assessment, and precautionary measures for the protection of all persons involved

    The principle of do no harm -- a classic feature of biomedical ethics that has been adapted for a range of service and research professions and activities -- includes and moves beyond matters of safety and Institutional Review Board oversight of research proposals. "Do no harm" means adhering to meaningful guidelines and checks for protecting the communities where Northwestern faculty, staff, and/or students intend to work, as well as the various organizations that host us, from unintended consequences. As it relates to community partnerships, this

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[1] Colleges and universities across the world, including Northwestern, have been developing and adopting strategic goals for community-engaged scholarship in tandem with efforts to further internationalize research and educational curricula. Higher education is placing increased importance on co-curricular activities along with research and learning initiatives that bring faculty and students out of the classroom and into direct engagement with diverse communities, whether at home or in the Global South. As Northwestern University contributes to this phenomenon, it is incumbent upon NU faculty and staff to advise and hold the university community accountable for developing, disseminating, and promoting sound principles for community engagement.

[2] While these principles are in line with those being developed by peer institutions, we hope that they can evolve, improve, and become progressively more effective through (1) ongoing processes of consultation and feedback with key community partners both at home and abroad, (2) the development of specific procedures for adapting and putting them into practice in the full range of relevant work by Northwestern faculty, staff, and students.

means that serious efforts are made to balance student learning and community outcomes, with attention to joint planning and assessment, preparation coursework and shared orientation, reciprocal commitments and exchange, along with efforts to set mutually defined goals for community sustainability and resilience.

2. Reciprocity and sustainability through <u>ethical, equitable relationships</u>. This encompasses:

   - A focus on sustainable relationships that outlast and grow beyond initial engagements
   - Deliberate, concerted, and systematic efforts to ensure reciprocity and equity in all collaborative partnerships
   - Ensuring that community partners are fully empowered as co-educators and/or co-researchers, and that the substance and benefits of the knowledge and projects produced accrue equitably to relevant stakeholders

   Too often research and service projects are conducted *on* rather than *with* communities, reinforcing hierarchies of status, expertise, and power that serve institutions like Northwestern at the expense of those we claim to serve. True reciprocity and sustainability depend on a commitment to building long-term, equitable relationships of exchange, in which community partners are fully empowered as co-researchers, co-educators of students, and equal voices in the design and implementation of all collaborative efforts. Implementation of this principle will require a subset of clear guidelines and procedures for ethical and equitable partnerships, and may be guided by frameworks including Fair Trade Learning, Participatory Action Research, and critical service learning.

3. <u>Cultural Humility</u>. This encompasses:

   - A serious engagement with the relevance of cultural and linguistic difference
   - An emphasis on listening to and learning from community partners with respect for local knowledge and diverse forms of expertise
   - Deep and ongoing learning, systematically integrated into program design and implementation, about the relevance of context and history to goals and methods of the project

   Cultural humility – as opposed to its conceptual cousin "cultural competence" – avoids the implication that sensitive and fair engagement with cultural difference is a technical skill that can be mastered, or that different cultures can be characterized and approached via reductive, stereotyped sets of qualities, traits, and traditions. Advocates of the principle of cultural humility aim to cultivate a deep recognition among scholars, students, and practitioners that no "expert" knows everything, that technical expertise does not necessarily trump local knowledge, and that no one—including representatives of elite global universities—has a monopoly on profound and potentially urgent insights about the challenges facing our societies. Northwestern faculty, staff, and students who have been supported in cultivating cultural humility will, for example, approach community partners as listeners, learners, and co-educators; recognize that rationality is plural, and that encounters with difference must be allowed to challenge our own frames of reference; approach unfamiliar practices and perspectives with nonjudgmental open-mindedness and empathy; eschew one-size-fits-all approaches that ignore crucial local, global, and historical contexts; and take responsibility for educating themselves as deeply as possible about all aspects of context, history, politics, and culture relevant to the work at hand.

4. Attention to <u>Diversity, Inclusion, and Inequality</u>. This encompasses:

   - Objectives and procedures for making projects and collaborations as meaningfully inclusive as possible
   - Systematic consideration of the ways the project shapes and is shaped by social inequalities connected to (e.g.) race, class, religion, gender, sexuality, and nationality
   - Regular opportunities for all participants to reflect and offer feedback on diversity issues in project design and implementation

   To substantially consider and integrate diversity into community-engaged scholarship is *to address the role of social inequality* as an inescapable determinant, mediator, and object of the project. A true commitment to diversity and inclusion in the work of a university must go beyond the incremental tweaking of student demographics and surface-level transformations that fail to substantially address the history and persistence of

deeply entrenched inequalities in knowledge production and scholarly authority, both in and beyond the contemporary academy. To value diversity in community-engaged scholarship is, at minimum, to engage all partners in deep reflection about how race, ethnicity, gender, class, culture, sexual orientation, age, education, and language differences—among other powerful social constructs and divisions—might shape and be shaped by the project. Attention to diversity and inequality must be an integral component of *all* community-engaged scholarship.

5. Commitment to <u>collaborative critical thinking and inquiry</u>. This encompasses

- Procedures for reflecting carefully on the values, interests, and priorities served by the collaboration, and what is at stake for vulnerable individuals or communities
- Procedures for critical analysis of project design and implementation at each stage, as well as processes for being responsive to critique in real time
- Careful attention to potential and actual unintended consequences of the work, along with appropriate measures of accountability and remediation when necessary

In our rush to address pressing, morally and existentially urgent global and local challenges, we run the risk of developing "solutions" that can cause as many problems as they address. Processes for promoting regular critical reflection, and for integrating the results of critique as the work unfolds, are important to developing partnerships that are flexible and responsive to community needs and issues in real time. Such critical reflection carries an ethical value and resolve, insofar as it serves as a mechanism of accountability to all stakeholders and presents openings for mitigating problematic or unexpected developments in the work.

Indeed, the value of CES is the emphasis it places on collaborative research and learning that combines academic expertise with local knowledge, drawing on the assets, resources and intellectual contributions of academic and non-academic practitioners alike. In this way, community engaged scholarship is able to uncover the sometimes-unseen complexities of social reality and illuminate practical possibilities for social change. This is often done through long-term partnerships and relationship building that shifts the focus of scholarship to be "carried out with and in the community, and not just on the community."[3]

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[3] Stanton, T., Connolly, B., Howard, J. & Litvak, L. (2013). Research university engaged scholarship toolkit; fourth edition. Boston: Campus Compact /initiatives/trucen/trucen-toolkit/.