

# NEXT-GENERATION ENGAGEMENT SCHOLARS IN THE NEOLIBERAL UNIVERSITY

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*Higher education represents a central site for keeping alive the tension between market values and those values representative of civil society that cannot be measured in narrow commercial terms but are crucial to substantive democracy.*

—Henry Giroux (2002, p. 433)

## Introducing the Neoliberal University

U.S. higher education has historically occupied public and private roles, a twin engine built to serve both democracy and the economy (Hursh & Wall, 2008; Labaree, 1997; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997). These dual aims, also conceptualized as the “capitalist knowledge” and “public knowledge” regimes by Slaughter and Rhoades (2009), were fairly well-balanced until the mid-1980s. Just as the capitalist knowledge regime was rising in prominence as a force shaping academic life, academic leaders began working to create or strengthen civic engagement commitments on college campuses (Berman, 2012; Bose, 2012; Hartley, 2011; Labaree, 1997; Thelin, 2004; Zemsky, Wegner, & Massy, 2005).

These efforts were born from the concerns of academics, nonprofit leaders, administrators, public officials, and students that higher education was losing its public purpose (Hartley, 2011; Kezar, Chambers, & Burkhardt, 2005). Stakeholders of universities and colleges all around the country became inspired by these efforts and took significant steps to institutionalize full participation and democratic engagement in public affairs for students,

faculty, staff, and community members on and off campus. At the heart of these efforts was an emphasis on leveraging the university's human capital in addressing the problems of surrounding communities.

In these early days of civic engagement, universities largely promoted technocratic approaches to community-university engagement. As the authors of this book argue, a new and different generation of academic leaders is pushing for the next evolution of these efforts that extends beyond technocratic engagement with local communities and a dualistic understanding of higher education's purpose. Next-generation engagement scholars are oriented toward the creation of an equitable and cocreated public engagement regime, as Saltmarsh and Hartley describe (see chapter 2). In order to support these scholars and achieve this vision of higher education, it is of paramount importance to attend to the preparation of the next generation of scholars in graduate school and the socialization of new faculty members, both on and off the tenure track.

Before attending to these socialization processes, it is first necessary to understand the conditions that have led to the ascendance of the capitalist academic regime in higher education. We argue that the current state of disequilibrium is due to the rise of neoliberalism as a dominant ideology shaping university life. Neoliberal ideology threatens the full participation ethos of civically engaged universities that have claimed and advanced the civic engagement movement. Neoliberalism is a political project and rationality that reduces the purpose of public institutions to their role within the market. This political project

entails submitting every action and policy to considerations of profitability; equally important is the production of all human and institutional action as rational entrepreneurial action, conducted according to a calculus of utility, benefit, or satisfaction against a micro-economic grid of scarcity, supply and demand, and moral-value neutrality. (Brown, 2003, p. 4)

Neoliberal public policies have led to the defunding of social welfare programs in order to leverage public resources and transform public institutions so that they advance the economic vitality of society (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2009). In higher education, those advancing a neoliberal ideology assume that higher education's sole purpose is to improve economic life and, as such, structure university and public policies to enhance the system's ability to serve as an engine for economic growth. As a result of the dominance of neoliberal ideology, universities and colleges have become increasingly privatized and commercialized, and there has been a chipping away at democratic shared governance. Students are viewed as customers who need to be

