



## *The Digitally Connected Academic: Public Scholarship and Activism in the Era of the Internet*

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### **Abstract:**

*Inspired by a lively discussion during the Southeastern Philosophy of Education Society's annual meeting in 2017, this special issue explores the roles, purposes, possibilities, and caveats of leveraging digital communication technologies (e.g., blogs, social media, etc.) within the academy. As scholars continue to grapple with and integrate new forms of understanding and new methods of disseminating their work, what, then, becomes the role of the public scholar? This issue explores the purposeful engagement of scholarly work and insight in new and traditional media to disseminate knowledge into the public discourse as a potential evolution of academia's mores.*

**Keywords:** *public scholarship, technology, public discourse*

### **Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

This special issue of *CQIE* is dedicated to engaging with questions about what types—and to what extent—professors and instructors should engage in public scholarship across digital platforms. Academics are certainly rewarded for focusing their time and energy on publishing their work in peer-reviewed journals and writing books. However, research on peer review has found that one-third of social science and more than 80% of humanities articles are never cited (Remler, 2014). Furthermore, while the number of academic books rose by 45%, from 43,000 to 63,000 between 2005 and 2014, the average sales per title fell from 100 to 60 (Jubb, 2017). Considering that readership and citations are a proxies for impact, should academics evolve the normative conceptions of scholarship to focus additional attention on creating ancillary work derived from their published research to engage in the public? While engagement in evolving communication technologies (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Blogs, YouTube, etc.) can serve as mechanisms by which traffic is directed towards academic journals and books, should faculty also view these platforms as neglected spaces where discourse often lacks empirical expertise? How much, how often, and to what ends should public scholarship take advantage of digital platforms?

The rise of new forms of technological communication platforms to engage in dialogue have provided ample space for individuals and organizations to promote public discourse about

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1. We wish to thank Jessica Heybach and Eric Sheffield for extending the invitation to put this special issue together and for their feedback and patience during the process. We would also like to thank the contributors (and the reviewers) for their important work in expanding the discussion surrounding a phenomenon that, despite our positions, we cannot escape and ignore.

education issues (Ravitch, Vasquez Heilig, & Brewer, in press). For example, market-oriented privatization reforms have expertly leveraged the power of social media to amplify their calls for shifting control of P-20 into the hands of privatizers and profiteers. New communication technologies have provided a space where myths of “failed schools” and “bad teachers” continue to thrive in cyberspace as they often go unchallenged by academics and others with expertise on the subject (Malin & Lubienski, 2015). In fact, the unchallenged voices of pro-reform groups on social media platforms have afforded those groups the opportunity to create echo chambers of commonsensical rhetoric about the need to reform schools (Brewer & Wallis, 2015).

Considering the potential evolution of the field and ongoing public discourse about contemporary education such as education reform on various technological platforms, the aim of this special issue was to begin—and continue for many—a dialogue exploring both why and how academics should or should not leverage online platforms to share their work and engage in public conversations. There is, of course, a competing disposition that academics should not engage in new technological modes of communication—following the Luddite tradition—and while the papers that follow do not necessarily take up this position, the reader will find, we hope, a balanced compilation of perspectives that promote digital work but others that issue important warnings and caveats.

### Summary of Individual Articles

The first article, written by Julian Vasquez Heilig and T. Jameson Brewer, explores the rationales for why public engagement—and digital engagement—is increasingly important in the modern policy landscape. Notably, given that advocates for marketization and privatization reforms are adept at leveraging such spaces, critical scholars should aggressively engage in those same spaces to provide factual and empirically-based solutions. The paper was presented at the 2017 annual meeting of the *Southeastern Philosophy of Education Society* conference and the lively discussion that followed was the genesis for this special issue.

Derek Ford and Petar Jandrić propose that digital spaces have, in fact, destroyed traditional conceptions of what it means to be a public intellectual. In addition to exploring the ways in which our post-truth world has reshaped how we understand our world, Ford and Jandrić implore us to work harder to develop real and authentic on-the-ground networks of insurgency as a necessary foundation for authentic public scholarship.

In the third paper, Jeff Utecht and Doreen Keller employ George Siemens’ Connectivism Learning Theory to lay out how and why academics can leverage various digital platforms. Their discussion reimagines new core literacy skills that students and professors must adopt.

Mary Quantz and Jason Buell argue that traditional education scholarship must continue to expand its reach and access to disenfranchised communities in order to address epistemic injustices. They lay out for the reader the importance of open-access journals in ensuring equitable access to knowledge and knowledge creation as a platform to address historical oversights by the academy.

The penultimate paper, written by Morgan Anderson and Gabriel Keehn, provide some important caveats and considerations surrounding the overarching discussion. That is, Anderson and Keehn navigate the challenges of using social media platforms to engage in authentic dialogue. They raise some significant philosophical limitations that cannot be ignored.

New digital spaces have exacerbated the growth of anti-intellectualism and “fake” news and presents new challenges of discerning truth. Matthew Kruger-Ross considers the reality

through the hermeneutic phenomenology of Martin Heidegger. Important to the consideration of how, when, why, and what limits we should consider in our use of technology, what remains constant is the impact that such platforms can, and do, have on our conception of democratic engagement and understanding of truth.

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