Unfurling Your Community-Engaged Work into Multiple Scholarly Products

Diane M. Doberneck

Michigan State University

Christine Carmichael

Castleton University

ABSTRACT

Navigating academic publishing challenges community-engaged scholars and practitioners, many of whom have mastered disciplinary writing but are unsure of how to write about community engagement experiences. The Unfurling Tool helps authors co-envision products with community partners, identify scholarly products for both academic and public audiences, and consider how to disseminate multiple products from a single community-engaged project. By unfurling a project, authors may communicate the rich complexity of their community engagement experiences to multiple audiences.

   Keywords: academic and public products, academic publishing, research tool, scholarly success, writing habits

INTRODUCTION

Despite pressures and incentives, faculty, academic staff, and graduate students struggle to turn their outreach and engagement work into scholarly publications. Even academics who have mastered disciplinary writing find themselves unsure about how to publish about their community engagement experiences. The Unfurling Tool was developed as a framework to think through publishing choices and strategies, and, ultimately, to support the habits of craftsmanship and care required for successful academic writing and dissemination (Sword, 2017).

   Advice about publishing community-engaged scholarship (CES) has focused exclusively on community-engaged research. Ahmed and Palermo (2010) advise about how to convey the rigors of research and incorporate community partner voice in journal articles. Based on their review of community-based participatory research articles, Smith, Rosenzweig, and Schmidt (2010) recommend ways to organize and structure a community-engaged research article. Bordeaux, Wiley, Tandon, and Horowitz (2007) offer counsel on appropriate titles, section names, and conclusions for publishing community-engaged research. Franz (2011) discusses how to present community-engaged research, including scholarly academic and public products, for reappointment, promotion, and tenure review. These authors focus on the mechanics of research article writing or on positioning research articles with other scholarly products after they have been written. However, none explicitly prompt authors to think through *what* and *where* and *how* to disseminate multiple products that represent the breadth and complexity of their community engagement experiences. The Unfurling Tool was developed to meet that need; that is, to provide a framework for strategically planning multiple scholarly products for both academic and public audiences from a single community-engagement project.

The Unfurling Tool's guiding image is of an early spring fern emerging from the earth in a tight coil to unfurl itself into a fully stretched out fern frond. Similarly, what might first appear to be a single journal article about a project can be unfurled into multiple articles that reflect the breadth and depth of the community-engaged experience. The Unfurling Tool may be used early in the project planning phase, throughout a project to ensure the collection of relevant partnership and engagement process data, and during later dissemination phases to co-envision scholarly public products with community partners. All project partners, including community partners, should be part of the conversation about unfurling a project. Forchuk and Meier (2004) have developed the Article Idea Chart to use with community partners to manage multiple, simultaneous writing projects, identify specific writing roles, and establish shared deadlines. Ideally, writers would use the Unfurling Tool first to strategize in the bigger picture and identify multiple scholarly products for diverse audiences, and then the Article Idea Chart to coordinate the writing process once those strategic decisions are made.
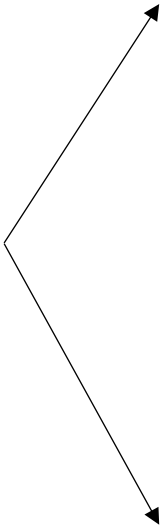
Figure 1

The Unfurling Tool

Topic	Disciplinary or Interdisciplinary Audiences	Sub-Audiences	Type of Article	Academic Products: Journals and Conferences	Public and Practitioner Products

		Disciplinary
		• Research
		• Teaching and learning (Scholarship of teaching and learning)
		• Research methodologies and methods
		• Community-engaged scholarship
		
		Interdisciplinary
		• Research
		• Teaching and learning (Scholarship of teaching and learning)
		• Research methodologies and methods
		• Community-engaged scholarship
			1. Conceptual frameworks, theories of change, models
			
			2. Program descriptions, case studies
			
			3. Methods or processes for partnerships or engagement
			
			4. Results or impacts on:
			  • Community
			  • Community organization
			  • Partnership
			  • Students
			  • Faculty or staff
			  • Institution
			
			5. Reflective critiques, lessons learned		

Figure 1 depicts the Unfurling Tool's six columns.

The Unfurling Tool is typically read from left to right (see Figure 1). Authors should consider what they would like to disseminate about their community-engaged work. At this unfurling stage, authors should think broadly and envision as many ideas as possible. These brainstormed topics may be recorded in column one, *Topic.*

After initial brainstorming, authors should consider each topic and decide whether that topic should be placed in a disciplinary or interdisciplinary journal. For tenure-track faculty members, disciplinary journals may be more highly valued by tenure review committees than interdisciplinary journals (Bond & Gannon, 2019; Whitaker, 2019). Thus, it is imperative that faculty members solicit advice from their mentoring committees about journal selections since substantial differences in institutional and disciplinary cultures exist (Doberneck & Schweitzer, 2017). The *Interdisciplinary/-Disciplinary Choice* is represented by the Unfurling Tool's column two.

Authors should decide in which kind of journal they would like to place their article. They may choose from among research journals, scholarship of teaching and learning journals, research methodology and methods journals, and community-engaged scholarship journals. These choices exist in both disciplinary and interdisciplinary journals and are listed in the column three, *Sub-Audiences.*

Next, authors should decide what type of article they would like to write. In both disciplinary and interdisciplinary journals, authors may choose from among five main types of articles, including: 1) conceptual frameworks, theories, or models; 2) program descriptions or case studies; 3) methods or processes for partnerships or engagement; 4) results or impacts; and 5) reflective critiques or lessons learned. For results or impacts of community-engaged scholarship, authors may report on results at various levels, including community, community organization, partnerships, students, faculty or staff, and institution of higher education levels (Bringle, Clayton, & Price, 2009). Choices about type of article are represented in column four, *Type of Article.*

Based on decisions about the sub-audience and the type of article, authors then strategize about specific, potential journals. Authors should examine which journals publish which kinds of articles in order to align the type of article they would like to write with the types the journal typically publishes. Most journals publish more than one type of journal article, so authors may have multiple choices within one journal. Authors should explore a wider variety of journals to ensure stronger alignment with journal publishing priorities, thereby improving the chances of acceptance. Campus Compact's knowledge hub contains useful resources for identifying publishing options in the interdisciplinary community engagement journal category (Doberneck, 2016, 2019). To further unfurl the project, potential academic journals and academic conferences may also be recorded in column five, *Academic Products: Journals and Conferences* column.

As Ellison and Eatman (2008) and Franz (2014) remind community-engaged scholars and practitioners, we are obligated to communicate our scholarship to public audiences, including community partners, decision-makers, practitioners, policy makers, journalists and other media representatives, and other relevant non-academic audiences. Scholarly public products may include policy briefs and recommendations, curriculum for informal education settings, research briefs, podcasts, and infographics, to name just a few examples. Consulting with community partners and representatives from specific public audiences is essential in this step, to ensure the envisioned public products align well with intended public audiences. To fur-

ther unfurl the project, choices about potential public audiences and communication channels appropriate for those audiences may be recorded in column six, *Public and Practitioner Products.*

While the Unfurling Tool presents each column as a discrete one, there is a dynamic interplay among the strategic choices authors make, especially between scholarly products for academic and public audiences (Ellison & Eatman, 2008). As authors refine topics and explore journals, they are likely to make revisions that necessitate changes back and forth across the columns. For example, as authors realize that two research articles are possible from a single project they may revise the initial single publishing idea in order to make different strategic choices about inter-disciplinary/disciplinary journals (e.g., choosing to submit one article in a disciplinary journal and another in an interdisciplinary one [column two]). As another example, the co-development of a public product with community partners (column six) may inform a new journal article about the development and impacts of the partnership itself (column three). Two examples illustrate ways the Unfurling Tool may be used. The first example shows how the tool helped to unfurl a scholarship of engagement project, while the second example illustrates how a community-engaged research project was unfurled.

Example One: Unfurling a Study About Publicly Engaged Scholarship

Researchers associated with Michigan State University's Office of University Outreach and Engagement conducted a content analysis of almost 200 re-appointment, promotion, and tenure (RPT) essays and forms. This multi-year study was unfurled into four journal articles, multiple conference presentations, and various public products, as shown in Figure 2. All articles were published in interdisciplinary community engagement journals. One was a conceptual paper that presented a new typology of publicly engaged scholarship (Doberneck, Glass, & Schweitzer, 2010). In research result papers two and three, the authors applied that typology to a data set to examine appointment status, rank, and type of community-engaged scholarship (Glass, Doberneck, & Schweitzer, 2011) and intensity of activity and degree of engagement (Doberneck, Glass, & Schweitzer, 2012), respectively. The fourth research paper reported analysis of the data using a different theoretical framework (Doberneck & Schweitzer, 2017). The public products generated from the study included a reappointment, promotion, and tenure discussion guide for deans, directors, and department chairs; dialogue cards that accompany the guide and prompt active learning; and a higher education practitioner-orientated article in the *Engagement Exchange* (Glass, Doberneck, & Schweitzer, 2010).

Figure 2

Unfurling a Scholarship of Engagement Research Project

Topic	Disciplinary or Interdisciplinary Audiences	Sub-Audiences	Type of Article	Academic Products: Journals and Conferences	Public and Practitioner Products
Research findings on publicly engaged scholarship reported in RPT documents	Interdisciplinary		Research results on faculty	Making Invisible Visible, successful faculty outreach and engagement in RPT, paper at IARSLCE (2009)	Expanding the definition of scholarship. *Engagement Exchange* (2009)
Typology of Publicly Engaged Scholarship	Interdisciplinary		Conceptual framework	Typology of Publicly Engaged Scholarship, paper at NOSC (2009)	
		Interdisciplinary • CES	Conceptual framework	From rhetoric to reality: A typology of publicly engaged scholarship. *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement (2010)*	Typology of Publicly Engaged Scholarship Report (2009)
Analysis of types of publicly engaged scholarship reported by faculty	Interdisciplinary	Interdisciplinary • CES	Research results on faculty	Unpacking faculty engagement: The types of activities faculty members report as publicly engaged scholarship during reappointment, promotion, and tenure. *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement (2011)*	1 university-wide report (2009) 15 Individual Reports for MSU Colleges (2009)

Need for evidence-based materials for holding unit-level RPT discussions	Interdisciplinary		Teaching and learning tools for practitioners	Convening constructive conversations, paper at NOSC (2011)	Dialogue Guide for Deans, Directors, and Department Chairs (2009, revised 2011) Dialogue cards
Analysis of intensity of activity and degree of engagement reported by faculty	Interdisciplinary	Interdisciplinary • CES	Research results on faculty	Beyond activity, place, and partner: How publicly engaged scholarship varies by intensity of activity and degree of engagement. *Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship (2012)*	
Analysis of disciplinary variations	Interdisciplinary		Research results on faculty	Disciplinary variations, paper at IARSLCE (2012)	
		Interdisciplinary • CES	Research results on faculty	Disciplinary variations in publicly engaged scholarship: An analysis using the Biglan Classification of Academic Disciplines. *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement (2017)*	

Figure 2 shows how the Unfurling Tool was used to generate multiple scholarly products from a scholarship of engagement research project.

Note. IARSLCE refers to the International Association for Research on Service-Learning and Community Engagement annual conference. NOSC refers to the National Outreach Scholarship Conference, which has since been renamed the Engagement Scholarship Consortium Conference.

Example Two: Unfurling a Community-Engaged Research Dissertation

Christine A. Carmichael, then PhD student in the Department of Forestry at Michigan State University, unfurled her community-engaged dissertation research into multiple academic and public products. Figure 3 lists her dissertation, her portfolio for the Graduate Certification in Community Engagement, and two academic journal articles. One research results article was published in a disciplinary journal and used political ecology and social justice frameworks for the analysis (Carmichael & McDonough, 2018); the other research results article, published in an interdisciplinary journal, used heritage narratives as an approach to community-engaged research (Carmichael & McDonough, 2019). Carmichael also presented the research at multiple academic and practitioner conferences. The scholarly public products developed for local and state government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and neighborhood organization audiences included PowerPoint presentations summarizing research findings, a decision-tree tool for nonprofits, research-finding talks for neighborhood organizations, community organizing workshops, and many other public products only some of which are listed in column five.

Figure 3

Unfurling a Community-Engaged Research Dissertation

Topic	Disciplinary or Interdisciplinary Audiences	Sub-Audiences	Type of Article	Academic Products: Journals and Conferences	Public and Practitioner Products
Urban and community forestry, political ecology, environmental justice, heritage narratives, community-engaged research	Disciplinary	Disciplinary • Research	Dissertation	The trouble with trees? Social and political dynamics of greening efforts in Detroit, Michigan *ProQuest Dissertation and Thesis Abstracts International*	
Political ecology and environmental justice frameworks	Disciplinary	Disciplinary • Research	Research results on community	The trouble with trees?: Social and political dynamics of street tree-planting efforts in Detroit, Michigan, USA *Urban Forestry and Urban Greening (2018)*	
Community-engaged research	Interdisciplinary	Interdisciplinary • Research • CES	Graduate Portfolio	Community-engaged research on tree planting in Detroit, Michigan	
Heritage narratives of Detroit residents	Interdisciplinary	Interdisciplinary • Research	Research results on community	Community stories: Explaining resistance to street tree-planting programs in Detroit, Michigan *Society and Natural Resources (2019)*	

Power dynamics and their role in residents' resistance to tree-planting; Heritage narratives of Detroit residents					3-page executive summary to nonprofit staff and neighborhood organizations
Methods for engaging with marginalized communities					Decision tree for street tree planting (for nonprofit staff)
Power dynamics and their role in residents' resistance to tree-planting; Heritage narratives of Detroit residents; Recommendations for community engagement in urban forestry					PowerPoint presentation to Detroit reforestation taskforce (including city government, state government, local to national nonprofit organizations)
Power dynamics and their role in residents' resistance to tree-planting; Heritage narratives of Detroit residents					Presentations to neighborhood organizations
Capacity-building for grassroots organizations to					Workshop with grassroots environmental organizations and

achieve environ-mental justice in urban restoration and forestry pro-grams				local govern-ment employees in the Washing-ton, DC/Mary-land region.

Figure 3 shows how the Unfurling Tool was used to generate multiple scholarly products from a community-engaged research disser-

tation.

DISCUSSION

Benefits and Limitations

For authors taught to view their research as *one project equals one article*, the Unfurling Tool prompts a broader conceptualization of what is possible to publish. Whitney Owen puts forward pragmatic and compassionate reasons for developing multiple publishable pieces from a single research project. Owen's *least publishable unit* approach prevents paralysis caused by pressure to write "the big one," generates multiple medium-sized articles that subsequently create positive writing momentum and confidence, and makes it easier to juggle competing professional and personal demands (Owen, 2006).

For community-engaged scholars and practitioners, who commit significant time and effort to developing authentic, reciprocal partnerships that form the basis of their community work, a single published article will likely constrain their opportunity to represent the full breadth of their community-engaged work. Multiple articles, focused on different aspects of the engagement experience, will better reflect the complexity and multi-leveled impact of community engagement. Publishing multiple articles also supports the dissemination of methodological innovations, which may inform other disciplines and fields.

For some authors, the Unfurling Tool may reveal unbounded possibilities and leave authors feeling overwhelmed or indecisive.

A conversation with a trusted colleague or mentor with the goal of prioritizing possible publications can ameliorate that situation. For authors familiar with disciplinary publishing norms and standards, the Unfurling Tool may represent a stretch into unfamiliar writing territory, e.g., interdisciplinary writing, writing different types of articles, or writing for unfamiliar audiences. For example, authors who are familiar with publishing research results may find writing about the partnership or engagement processes unfamiliar or challenging. Reading successfully published articles that focus on partnership building, processes of engagement or collaboration, or other topics brainstormed during the unfurling process will familiarize authors with how to publish their work in new ways and for broader audiences.

CONCLUSIONS

The Unfurling Tool supports community-engaged scholars and practitioners as they broaden their conceptualization of what is possible to publish; encourages an intentional, dynamic interplay between academic and public products; and invites community partners to co-envision products, especially those for public audiences. As community-engaged scholars and practitioners, we know more happens than can be contained in a single manuscript. By unfurling community-engaged scholarship into multiple publications, we can examine, celebrate, and disseminate our complex community engagement experiences more fully.

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AUTHOR NOTE

Diane M. Doberneck is Director for Faculty and Professional Development, Office for Public Engagement and Scholarship, in the Office for University Outreach and Engagement and adjunct assistant professor in the department of community sustainability at Michigan State University. She may be reached at connordm@msu.edu.

Christine A. Carmichael, is founder of Fair Forests, a consulting business that strengthens diversity, equity, and inclusion in environmental nonprofit organizations and government agencies, and teaches at Castleton University in Vermont. She may be reached at fairforests@gmail.com.