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ACADEMIC CITIZENSHIP

Academic Citizenship as Civic Professionalism

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Abstract

In this essay, I argue that academic citizenship needs to be focused on civic professionalism. Too often, individualism renders undue costs to the broader academic community. Looking to research in higher education on civic professionalism, I argue that its tenets, which focus on contributing to the community, can allow those of us in academia to realize for ourselves what is needed for our students and future generations. I employ the lens of an ecological framework to illustrate the possibilities and priorities of viewing and implementing academic citizenship as civic professionalism.

Keywords: academic citizenship; civic professionalism; ecological framework

This essay argues that an academic citizen is someone who contributes to their academic community through civic professionalism and becomes stronger because of their participation in that community. Scholars have defined academic citizenship as: "a set of attitudes and activities connected to internal and external service work. They help to support the infrastructure of academic life and the wider civic mission of the university" (Macfarlane & Burg, 2018, p. 16). I argue that academic citizenship means acting as a responsible community member of academia. This means that an individual contributes not just for their own good but for the greater good. I

employ civic professionalism's tenets of focusing on the community to provide a lens for what it means to engage in responsible academic citizenship within academia.

In this essay, I first outline the epistemological, ontological, and moral underpinnings which align civic professionalism as the tenet to guide academic citizenship. I then illustrate examples of the ways in which academia's focus on individualism renders harmful costs to members of the academic community. I also utilize the lens of an ecological framework to illustrate opportunities for realizing civic professionalism.

Conceptualization of Civic Professionalism

Definitions of academia and civic professionalism provide a way to clarify the basis for the present argument. I conceptualize academia broadly, in which it can be defined as "the life, community, or world of teachers, schools, and education" (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2023, para. 1). In this essay, I consider academia focused on higher education: instructors, staff, institutions, and education. New American Colleges and Universities (NACU, 2023) defines civic professionalism as:

> Going beyond the singular concept of leveraging one's profession to make a living, it stresses the role of citizens to use their skills and expertise to the benefit of their communities. In addition, it implores citizens to not only apply their knowledge to society but to work in concert with others to effect positive change. (para. 1)

The distinction between civic engagement (among students in the academy) and civic professionalism has emphasized that civic professionals:

> focus their professional energy on a public mission and use their technical competence to advance broader social perspectives. They act in a deliberative way that enables them to share power, work collaboratively, and engage the public to address wicked problems. (Longo, 2023, p. 7)

This distinction emphasizes a focus on community rather than the individual.

Tracing back to Dewey's (1925) notions of active and reflective citizenship informing the management of schools and workplaces, Dzur (2004) posited that civic professionalism provides a strategy to "help reduce the paternalistic, centralized, remote, and minimally accountable dimensions of contemporary economic and political power" (p. 12). Furthermore, Boyte and Fretz (2010) argued that civic professionalism facilitates an avenue to combat an overly competitive and individualist climate found within academia in higher education. Turner's

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(1990) theory of citizenship compared conservative (passive and private) citizenship to revolutionary citizenship (active and public), and this essay classifies civic professionalism toward the active and public for the focus on community and the greater good.

From a conceptualization standpoint, civic professionalism connects to a critical paradigm ontology which assumes that humanity exists within a set of power struggles (Lincoln et al., 2011). Indeed, the academy is rife with power struggles among groups with varying positional power, such as tenured faculty, tenure-track faculty, and contingent faculty; faculty and administration; administration and students; faculty/staff and students; and faculty and staff. From an epistemological perspective, civic professionalism embodies the notion that truth is subjective depending on the perspective of the one who is asked to speak the truth (Merriam, 1991). Indeed, the wicked problems challenging today's academy (contingent faculty rights; learner engagement; declining enrollments; artificial intelligence) can be seen as having differing importance and urgency based on the perspective of members of the academic community. Therefore, civic professionalism provides an avenue to dismantle the power structure toward empowering all members of the academic community. Researchers have invoked the moral responsibility institutional life requires and have offered civic professionalism as a way forward (Sullivan, 1999). Civic professionalism has been embraced to varying degrees by differing academic disciplines but is being pursued as an avenue for strengthening leadership within higher education (NACU & Kettering Foundation, 2021).

Finally, a note that the use of the word citizen poses limitations. According to Merriam Webster (2022), a citizen is "a native or naturalized person who owes allegiance to a government and is entitled to protection from it" (para. 1). The word citizen is problematic as it assumes that a citizen is one who is legally recognized and thus part of the community with privileges, when in fact the word citizen currently excludes many people, such as undocumented individuals, those on visas, and other statuses that render people as other because they do not hold a specific country's citizenship. Civic professionalism provides a way to focus on community wherein individuals have the responsibility to serve others by facilitating belonging, inclusion, and opportunities for more voices to be heard (Longo, 2023).

Some Problems within Academia

I briefly summarize a few current problems in academia that can be addressed through civic professionalism. A systemic problem is that minoritized individuals continue to be

underrepresented in a system which was designed for White cisgender heterosexual men (Fox Tree & Vaid, 2021). Of further concern, research has shown that People of Color, first-generation academics, and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Queer (LGBTQ) individuals complete a disproportionate amount of invisible work and in particular emotional labor toward addressing diversity issues within academia (Flaherty, 2019; Jimenez et al., 2019). These individuals are asked to do more, including advising and supporting students, and often these students have minoritized identities. This occurs despite the reality that it is well known that responsibilities such as diversity work and advising are important to the success of institutions of higher education yet have little if any bearing on tenure decisions (Interfolio, 2023).

Another problem is the extent to which the explosion in productivity metrics and publications (see Savage & Olejniczak, 2022) has obfuscated a focus on community efforts (Beatson et al., 2021). To be sure, such conflicts within academia echo the reality that competing priorities within education are not new (Thelin, 2019). Among tenure-track faculty, the singular drive to publish or perish can be mitigated by building a more positive work environment with more reward structures can reduce faculty turnover (Daly & Dee, 2006; Lindholm, 2003). In addition, scholars have called for defining and rewarding academic citizenship to bolster the importance of the community within institutions of higher education (Macfarlane & Burg, 2018). Thus, the tenets of academic citizenship as seen through civic professionalism provide a way forward to address these wicked problems by focusing on the community rather than the individual, as addressed through examples in the subsequent section.

Civic Professionalism Through a Social Systems Lens

Opportunities to engage civic professionalism toward responsible academic citizenship abound. A social systems lens outlined by Bronfenbrenner (1994) provides a structure to emphasize and illustrate possibilities at three levels: the micro (individual), meso (organizational), and macro (system). An ecological framework provides a useful lens to consider the sphere of influence for which agents and actors have the authority and opportunity. For the purposes of this paper, the micro level refers to individual agents comprising institutions of higher education, including leadership, faculty, and staff. The meso level invokes the responsibility of institutions of higher education as individual entities and a collective. The macro level considers the larger system of higher education overall, such as federal policies and overarching political structures, such as incentives and incentives based on capitalism.

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Micro

To be sure, micro choices are not made in a vacuum without the influence of larger pressures at the meso and macro levels. Yet where possible, individuals can try to choose to engage in civic professionalism toward realizing academic citizenship. Individual and societal well-being are related (World Health Organization, 2021), and individuals must first ensure their own well-being to be able to better care for their communities. Members of the academic community can prioritize engaging in self-care and mental health counseling when needed. Faculty and staff can define themselves by more than just a career (Goldberg, 2023). Prioritizing family, friends, and community service while limiting social media use are a few ways to go about this, as outlined recently by the United States Surgeon General (2023) in an advisory on how to address loneliness.

Institutions of higher education and their agents must acknowledge the need to combat historical trends where minoritized individuals continue to be underrepresented (Fox Tree & Vaid, 2021). Faculty and student affairs professionals need to engage in meaningful advising with students which can contribute to powerful diversity, equity, and inclusion work (Kuh et al., 2006). Many schools and colleges within higher education have committees engaged in this work, and many campuses have entire offices committed to equity, diversity, and inclusion. It is important to do individual work toward making more inclusive campus climates (Saad, 2020). Members of higher education institutions can also choose to be part of existing institutional, system, and/or national organizations engaged in collective organizing so that more individuals and groups have access to health insurance, paid leave, and parental leave.

Individuals make choices about how time is spent. In an increasingly remote and hybrid work environment as an effect of the COVID-19 pandemic, faculty and administrative leaders need to make a point to engage in social interactions with those who are rendered as second-class citizens within academia (Collins, 2021): administrative assistants, staff, graduate student assistants, junior faculty, and postdoctoral scholars are just a few groups that are too often treated as lesser. People in leadership positions need to lead by example by using paid leave to manage health and mental health. Using out of office features in email and committing to that time away are also important to taking a real break (Grant, 2023).

Meso

There are steps institutions of higher education can take toward realizing civic professionalism as academic citizenship. Institutions need to engage in post-tenure review processes that ensure accountability to students and their families who are paying tuition while maintaining a commitment to academic freedom (American Association of University Professors, 1999). In addition, institutions need to update tenure guidelines and performance review expectations to have measurable expectations for service, such as advising, diversity and equity work, and/or community service (Interfolio, 2023). These factors need to carry real weight and need to be considered not on top of an exponentially increasing expectation for research productivity, but rather by setting up a new equation that adds real balance to competing priorities.

Institutions of higher education can also set up evidence-based mentoring programs. Researchers and federal funding agencies have published extensively on the benefits of mentoring (McGee et al., 2019; National Institutes of Health, 2008; Pfund et al., 2015). Institutions can ensure that these programs are accessible and in place at all levels, with designs to involve undergraduate students, graduate students, junior faculty, and staff, with particular attention to those who have minoritized identities. Mentoring matters and this work should be organized with clear expectations and performance metrics, rather than stumbled upon by those who know enough about the system to ask for it and to ask the right person.

In addition, leaders of institutions of higher education need to find ways to engage in servant leadership which facilitates communication that is honest and timely (VanBenschoten, 2020). For example, servant leadership means ensuring that there is responsible fiscal management despite an increasingly challenging environment with the continuing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and inflation (Quinn, 2023). Yet ensuring that pay keeps up with inflation and that salary compression for newly hired staff is commensurate with salaries for those with more experience cannot be overlooked or deferred.

Macro

Systems of higher education need to take responsibility for civic professionalism as academic citizenship. Professional organizations and institutional members of those organizations need to find ways to address existing crises in higher education. Labor issues within higher education include the rise of underpaid adjunct labor which was in crisis prior to

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the pandemic (The Review, 2018), the reduction in tenure track investment (Williams June, 2018), and an increased numbers of postdocs who are spending more years in postdoc positions (Woolston, 2020). There are myriad issues for student access and success, including for minoritized students such as undocumented students (Corral, 2021) and trans students (The Trevor Project, 2021). Institutions of higher education also need to engage national and global organizations in addressing hate speech, hate crimes, harassment, and violence, both in-person and online. As a collective, members of institutions of higher education must act toward social justice to truly pursue inclusion regardless of background and identity. Civic professionalism embodies the way forward for addressing and ameliorating these wicked problems.

Within academia, there are larger systems subject to neoliberal priorities that need to be addressed. Athletic organizations, such as the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) which is comprised of institutional members, need to do more to ensure the safety and health of athletes and the inclusion of women and trans individuals (Reynolds & Hamidian Jahromi, 2021). Faculty and staff need to address neoliberalism within the publication process by ensuring libraries have affordable access to resources and that people are awarded either compensation and/or credit for their contributions to the oversight system that constitutes peer review (Ravindran, 2016). As evidenced by the recent race for COVID-19 vaccines, success depends on prioritizing success as measured by people's health and access rather than revenue (see Oxfam International, 2021). Further, institutions of higher education need to prioritize support for global systems for success. Visas for students and employees, for example, need to systematically keep talent and reward commitment (Allison & Schmidt, 2022). The United States and countries around the globe also need comprehensive immigration reform to address life and death issues encountered by refugees and asylum seekers (United Nations, n.d.). From the macro level to the micro, opportunities abound for civic professionalism to inform academic citizenship.

Conclusion

This essay argues that academic citizenship as civic professionalism constitutes focusing on community priorities. The problems within academia resulting from a systematic focus on individuals are well known and documented. A conceptualization of civic professionalism demonstrates possibilities for strengthening communities within academia at micro, meso, and macro levels. As academic citizens, the future rests on prioritizing communities, and civic professionalism offers forward avenues.

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