

ABSTRACT

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ENGAGED GRADUATE EDUCATION

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The civil rights era sparked renewed calls to embrace the public mission of higher education (Butin, 2005). Service-learning and civic engagement initiatives often constitute aspects of undergraduate students' curriculum or co-curriculum (O'Meara, 2011b). Similar initiatives in graduate education have yet to capture the imagination of a substantial number of graduate educators (Gilvin, 2012). This qualitative study explores experiences of University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC) graduate students with engaged pedagogies, practices, and scholarship in graduate school. Drawing upon the principles and commitments of participatory action research and ethnography, I worked with forty-one participants from seventeen different graduate programs spanning the three UMBC colleges in an interactive, reflexive, and participatory manner to collectively pose problems, reflect on experiences, interpret collected texts, and consider future action.

Many participants described their graduate education as an isolating experience, frequently using the metaphors of 'silos' and 'bubbles.' They reported having experienced a stark emphasis on disciplinary teaching, a binary between 'experts' and 'citizens,' a separation between theory and practice, and reward structures that legitimize isolating practices.

Participants want engaged and reflexive educational experiences. They identified the following drivers behind this expectation: being marginalized or encountering marginalization of affiliated groups; being socialized to value engagement and co-creation by their family, church, and school; and having a desire for meaningful and holistic lives. Many participants sought opportunities for engagement that reflected their values of interdisciplinary work, collaboration, and integrative approaches to theory and action in curricular and co-curricular work.

When invited to imagine ways to reconstruct graduate education, participants shared their hopes, visions, and aspirations for an education that fosters collaborative and interdisciplinary learning; integrates theory and practice; encourages work with individuals and groups beyond the academy; and supports scholarship that directly impacts society. Such an education, they hope, will provide them with the experiences necessary for a broad range of careers and active participation in society.