

## **Public Scholarship: A Tool for Strengthening Relationships Across Extension, Campus, and Community**

### **Abstract**

Higher education resources are increasingly limited due to declining budget revenue and other challenges. Thus, it is vital for Cooperative Extension to synergize efforts of disseminating education to the public. Promoting public scholarship in and beyond Extension is a promising initiative that can foster collaborations by leveraging existing resources in advancing the Extension mission. We highlight a new program aimed at encouraging a culture of public scholarship across academia. The program is intended to increase knowledge about public scholarship and awareness of its benefits to stakeholders, identify barriers to public scholarship, and provide concrete examples of ways Extension and non-Extension faculty can collaborate on research and programming efforts.

**Keywords:** [public scholarship](#), [engagement](#), [researchers](#), [workshop](#), [broader impacts](#)

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### **Introduction**

In an era when higher education institutions are facing continued declines in financial support and other budgetary challenges, creative solutions are needed within Extension to overcome the resulting constraints (e.g., Page & Kern, 2018). These challenges often precipitate cuts to personnel and resources that impede the development of evidence-based programming and dissemination of research to communities, which is the very mission of Extension. Moreover, engaging in empirical research and program evaluation in an effort to update old or develop new evidence-based programs takes considerable time. Due to programming demands, Extension professionals are faced with constraints on their time that make engaging in this research and executing needed program updates challenging. Non-Extension research faculty may be a valuable resource for accomplishing these goals; however, fostering mutually beneficial partnerships is often challenging due to ongoing misunderstandings about the roles and responsibilities of these key stakeholders and the importance of scholarly engagement (Varkey, Smirnova, & Gallien, 2018). In this article, we propose a public scholarship program that promotes collaboration by creating the opportunity for dialogue between Extension professionals and non-Extension researchers interested in outreach and broader impact activities.

### **What Is Public Scholarship and How Can It Help?**

According to the Center for Community and Civic Engagement (2018), public scholarship involves "diverse modes

of creating and circulating knowledge for and with publics and communities" (para. 2), and it is considered a process that integrates community engagement with research, teaching, and service for the public interest (Yapa, 2006). Public scholarship is connected to similar concepts, such as engaged research, translational science, science communication, and public outreach. Likewise, public scholarship is the essence of Extension itself. The National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities [Kellogg Commission], 1999) has underscored engaged institutions—those that focus their teaching, research, extension, and service functions on becoming productively involved with communities and putting knowledge to work—as key to addressing societal needs. Further, engagement is put forth as a critical mechanism in changing campus culture so that land-grant institutions may "return to their roots" of public service (Kellogg Commission, 1999). However, public scholarship is also an underlying necessity of all research conducted for the purpose of addressing a need, advancing discovery, making change, or otherwise benefiting society. In fact, the National Science Foundation and many notable funding sources require broader impacts and other dissemination tactics to ensure that the results of funded research do not reside only in journals to which the public does not have access. Public scholarship "does not assume that useful knowledge simply flows outward from the university . . . it recognizes that new knowledge is created in its application in the field and therefore benefits the teaching and research mission of the university" (Yapa, 2006, p. 73). Despite many scholars initially pursuing careers in research to have a direct societal impact, numerous constraints impede this work. A major impediment is tenure requirements that focus on publications in which research findings are *available* but most *accessible* only to privileged populations (i.e., academicians). The pressure to "publish or perish" makes it difficult for campus research faculty to take steps beyond their basic research to focus on the dissemination and programmatic implications of their work (Hutchinson, 2011). This is where a mutually beneficial partnership with Extension can prove fruitful for research faculty: Collaboration between non-Extension scholars and Extension professionals provides non-Extension scholars with the resources needed to leverage broader impacts. At the same time, Extension professionals gain additional informed research needed to augment, update, and validate the educational programming they deliver.

## **A Program to Promote Public Scholarship and Foster Mutually Beneficial Partnerships**

Scholars have historically called for research faculty to partner with individuals working directly in communities and to engage in collaborative campus–community projects (Ellison & Eatman, 2008). This partnering also includes connecting with organizations whose missions directly tie to effecting change (Hutchinson, 2011). Yet these calls rarely include strategies for developing partnerships. To address this oversight, we created the Promoting and Engaging in Public Scholarship (PEPS) program. The PEPS program is intended to be a series of workshops that evolve through collaboration and are updated following their application in the field and subsequent evaluations of their facilitation. We have developed the initial program workshop, with the intention that Extension professionals (and individuals in academia more broadly) will present and collaboratively build on it to grow the program in an evolutionary way by creating additional sessions in the series. This evolution is vital because public scholarship requires integrative evaluation and feedback in order for continued improvements to programs to occur. PEPS is open to any individuals interested in science communication or outreach. As well, facilitators can be Extension or non-Extension professionals willing to disseminate the content and facilitate discussion about public scholarship.

Our inaugural goal with PEPS is to encourage partnerships and promote a culture of public scholarship by (a) increasing knowledge about public scholarship and highlighting its benefits to Extension and non-Extension

stakeholders and (b) identifying barriers to public scholarship and outlining steps toward addressing them, collaboratively.

More specifically, the objectives for the initial workshop are as follows:

- Introduce participants to public scholarship and its related terms.
- Discuss the ways public scholarship benefits Extension and non-Extension faculty missions, as well as the public good.
- Highlight the overlap between the Cooperative Extension mission (e.g., the Smith-Lever Act) and public scholarship.
- Describe public scholarship as a continuum of meeting participants where they are while increasing their awareness of broader impacts.
- Note barriers to engaging in public scholarship at a variety of stages depending on position type.
- Facilitate a discussion of how to overcome barriers collaboratively.
- Identify exemplar programs to generate more ideas and dialogue.
- Provide ideas for next steps or how to get started engaging in public scholarship.

The initial PEPS workshop presentation (a PowerPoint document that includes both slides and detailed notes) is available to those looking to foster conversations about how to promote public scholarship (see <http://hdfs.missouri.edu/PEPS.html>). In exchange, we encourage program facilitators to use the evaluation tools provided to collect data and send those data to our team (via first author J. Kale Monk at [monkj@missouri.edu](mailto:monkj@missouri.edu)) so that we can make needed improvements to advance the program. We also encourage scholars interested in collaboration to partner with us to create additional sessions in the PEPS program.

## Conclusion

Public scholarship is vital to the mission of Extension and in alignment with the values of scientific research. By using public scholarship as a uniting framework, Extension professionals focused on the development and delivery of educational programming and non-Extension researchers focused on the generation of evidence-based information can partner to leverage their complementary foci for the public good. PEPS provides a starting point for fostering these collaborative conversations.

### Recommendations for Further Reading

In order to disseminate the PEPS program in a comprehensible way, we recommend that facilitators be familiar with important literature about public scholarship. We have compiled a list of suggested readings:

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