

Public Abstract

First Name:Victoria

Middle Name:Anne

Last Name:Steel

Adviser's First Name:Peggy

Adviser's Last Name:Placier

Co-Adviser's First Name:

Co-Adviser's Last Name:

Graduation Term:SS 2009

Department:Educational Leadership & Policy Analysis

Degree:PhD

Title:Evaluating the Engaged Institution: The Conceptualizations and Discourses of Engagement

As a relatively new term applied to the activities of higher education, "engagement" is an emerging conception that is being constructed and defined by actors within and outside of higher education. This study examined the multiple uses and understandings of engagement for higher educational institutions. The literature review revealed that many of these understandings can be linked to one of two legitimizing discourses regarding the role and purpose of higher education as a whole - epistemological and political (Brubacher, 1982). Nested into the political perspective were three distinct themes for how higher education should meet its social or public service mission - civic education, collaboration, or public service (Kezar, 2005).

Currently, systems and measures for evaluating the accomplishment of engagement are being developed. The activity and process of evaluation defines measures, refines concepts, directs resources and shapes policy. Thus, the discourses that are invoked to support the evaluation of engagement and the construction and selection of the measures are simultaneously revealing and setting the boundaries for problem and solution conceptualization.

Using the theories and methods of discourse analysis, this study examined two engagement evaluation systems - the North Central Association-Higher Learning Commission and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. Gee's (1999) tools of inquiry were assimilated with Barnettson and Cutright's (2000) typology of the normative assumptions embedded in performance indicators to develop engagement evaluation tools of inquiry. The findings of this study revealed the multi-faceted ways in which the concept of engagement is being constructed and evaluated by different stakeholders.