

## A Visit With . . . Barbara Holland

Barbara Holland, Ph.D. is recognized internationally for her scholarship and expertise on organizational change in higher education with a focus on institutionalization of community engagement. As an academic leader, Barbara held senior administrative positions at Portland State University, Northern Kentucky University, University of Western Sydney, and University of Sydney. In government-related roles, she was Director of the Learn and Serve America National Service-Learning Clearinghouse for seven years and Visiting Director of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Office of University Partnerships for two years during the Clinton and Bush administrations. As a researcher and consultant, Barbara has advised many colleges and universities in the USA and other nations regarding community engagement institutionalization and leadership of change, and she has authored many publications of note, including the creation of the Holland Matrix for institutionalization of engagement.

Barbara was a founding board member and 2011-12 Chair of the International Association for Research on Service-Learning and Community Engagement (IARSLCE), and she also was a founding member of the National Review Board for the Scholarship of Education, the National Advisory Panel for the Carnegie Elective Classification for Community Engagement Alliance (now called Engagement Australia) which in 2008 named her one of their first two honorary fellows. In 2006, she received the IARSLCE Award for Research Achievement. She was executive editor of *Metropolitan Universities*, the journal of the Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities (CUMU) for 17 years and served on editorial boards for five other refereed journals. Barbara has long been affiliated with CUMU which has honored her by launching the Barbara A. Holland Scholar-Administrator Award in 2018. The library of the University of Nebraska-Omaha is home to the Barbara A. Holland Collection for Service-Learning and Community Engagement which houses an up-to-date collection of more than 10,000 volumes pertinent to the field.

Barbara's current research and practice interests include the design of national and international frameworks for professional development of academic leaders, analysis of the strategic importance of community engagement to teaching, learning, and research quality, and the development of comprehensive data systems for monitoring and measuring engagement's impacts and outcomes. Barbara's bachelor and master's degrees are in journalism from the University of Missouri, and her Ph.D. is in higher education policy from the University of Maryland. She resides in Portland, Oregon.

**Jean Strait (JS):** Hi Barbara! I'm really excited to do this interview with you. We're at this wonderful point with service-learning and civic engagement where our first generation of leaders are starting to pass torches and collect histories. You've been studying community engagement and service-learning for a long time. Where did all this start for you? How did you get involved with community-engagement and service-learning?

**Barbara Holland (BH):** Well, of course, that language of community engagement and service learning is in some ways quite recent. My path to what we now call engagement goes back further. I began my career in higher education in media relations and institutional advancement, informed by my two degrees in journalism. My first director of media relations

job was at an institution then called the University of Southern Colorado. While I was there, negotiations across the State Higher Education Commission and two governing boards led to an agreement that the University of Southern Colorado, which was part of the state college system, would become Colorado State University-Pueblo. So in my role, I managed both the internal and the external news, discussion, and understanding of why this was happening, what it meant, and what effects it would have on our internal culture as well as relationships and responsibilities with the region. It was a valued institution in a city that was experiencing economic changes. There was much internal and public dialogue about how the change could be beneficial for the community, for the economy, for student access, and so on. This experience of communicating a major

institutional change was useful when I was hired to do a similar job for the newly minted University of Colorado-Denver campus. Again, I was involved in internal and external communications about the development of the new campus and its mission and culture. It was a great learning experience to witness the development of a new campus, requiring the development of relationships with the community as well as the inaugural organization of colleges, departments, and all the essential administrative and cultural features of a university.

Those two experiences really changed my career path completely. I became interested in institutional change in the context of place. Both of those campuses were changing with the intent that it would bring progress and economic and educational benefit to an underserved urban area. How great is that?! I realized I was ready to seek a doctoral degree in higher education.

I moved to University of Maryland, got a job as Associate Dean in the Graduate School, and started my doctoral work. At the time, the University of Maryland was home to the only federally funded national research center on higher education. What an amazing experience to do my coursework and research with scholars studying higher education on a national scale. It was an extraordinary experience that cemented my interest in the processes of institutional change and engagement in higher ed. My dissertation focused on discovering the distinct characteristics of self-identified urban or metropolitan universities.

My next job was at Portland State University where my initial role was to help with their strategic planning and transformation into an exemplary urban university. As I arrived, a voter initiative to reduce taxes succeeded and led to huge and rapid reductions in funding for all the public universities. A new president at PSU wisely organized a highly participatory process for reshaping the institution in the allotted 18 months. She framed the transformation with this guiding question: *If we*

*were building a new university what would we build with this amount of funding? What can we be?* The process began with listening sessions with business, industry, and community leaders regarding their hopes for the university. Many working groups were formed across employees and faculty to develop innovative ideas to reduce costs, increase productivity, and reform the curriculum to improve student retention,

progress, and completion. This participatory process was successful in building a strong identity and culture of collaboration across the institution and was recognized by several foundations and organizations for its innovative nature. An institution that had not previously had a clear identity or great confidence successfully organized itself around the idea of “Let knowledge serve the city.” That motto is now emblazoned on an overpass bridge on the main campus. The institution changed in many important ways because the participatory process took the

city as its focus: *How does an urban university advance its city?* Interesting measures of success included enrollment growth, improved student retention and graduation rates, as well as increased research productivity through partnerships, among other strategies. This experience confirmed my focus on leading change around engagement in higher education.

**JS:** So did this spark a wider transformation of urban institutions?

**BH:** In the 1980s, urban/metropolitan universities began to understand they are both in and of their cities, meaning that it is their calling to direct a lot of their teaching, learning, research, and engagement capacity to the relationship of the campus and the city. The Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities was founded at Wright State University in 1989 and is a thriving organization in today’s urbanized America (i.e., 85% of the population live in cities). At the same time, interest in what

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we now call service-learning and community engagement also was emerging. Connections between higher education, schools, and nonprofit organizations with the Corporation for National and Community Service contributed to the growth of engaged connections between higher education and communities through direct funding and recognition. Funding for community engagement came also from the Department of Education and the Department of Housing and Urban Development through competitive grants for campus-community partnerships. The rapid growth of community engagement in the 1990s was partially attributable to government awareness of the power of higher education to be a force for positive change and equity in both small and big cities to transform and create greater equity and opportunity in communities. These federal grants did solidify the language of engagement and create some sense of standards of good practice. Unfortunately, to some degree it also set up expectation that a college or university had to get extra money to do it. As these government programs expired, there was a bit of a challenge for some institutions to see this as integral to their budget and of their own institution's performance and success in the realms of teaching, learning, and research. David Weerts at the University of Minnesota has done extraordinary research revealing the good effects of high quality community engagement activities across higher education as measured by positive impacts on government relations, fund raising, and alumni involvement/attachment.

Similarly, one of the interesting things that occurred in the early 1990's was the first name-endowed center for engagement in America, the Bennion Center, at the University of Utah. The first was quickly followed by announcements of many other endowed centers across the country, and it continues today. Most are funded by alumni or by regional donors, all deeply aware of higher education's capacity to advance community goals.

**JS:** I know as institutions start seeing the value of engagement we are also starting to see different professional positions come into play. More universities create positions like AVP (Associate Vice President) for community engagement or AVP for community outreach, and my former position as

AVP for Education Pipelines is an example. You see a lot of those positions being created, and I think universities do see it as being valuable. It's interesting because not everybody has created such positions. Institutions that are moving in that direction seem to be aligning with their mission and purpose, asking questions about what they want to accomplish and how they will measure that impact.

We have a lot of students in our universities that have both food and housing insecurity. Do you feel that service-learning and civic engagement is still something that is accepted by the student population today? Do you think it's good? Is it something that they can fit into their schedules?

**BH:** There was a big breakthrough when the American Association of Colleges and Universities released their rigorous research that revealed the types of high impact practices on student learning and the positioning of service-learning. That list has been absolutely confirming of what we can all see on the ground in terms of students seeing community/service-learning as valuable as an internship or other kinds of experiential learning. Service-learning, in my opinion, is best integrated into coursework. It makes it more accessible to students than other forms of experiential learning that may be difficult for students to participate in if they're working a lot or have transportation issues. Embedding service-learning in their course means that students were more likely to have support to participate through group transportation and doing it as part of class time. The California State University system, in the early 2000s, added a few questions about service-learning to their survey of students about their learning experiences. Responses from students who said they had participated in service-learning suggested that students prefer courses with an experiential element, even if they also were working. Their comments suggested that service-learning, even though it was time intensive, was more powerful to them than written assignments because with service-learning they could learn by doing and enhance their resume.

**JS:** Absolutely.

**BH:** Here we are today in an urbanized country with 85% of Americans living in big cities and 90% of the economy concentrated in big cities. Engagement has changed everything for urban institutions and

for their students and their cities. Higher ed at large is getting a lot of criticism in the wider media for a variety of reasons, targeting mostly the cost of a degree and questions about its actual value. Not only are degrees still valuable for personal success, but also higher education institutions are incredibly important to regional and local economic success. There are so many cities and communities of all sizes where higher education institutions are seen as an important resource to the economy, the culture, the equity, and the vibrancy of that city or town. The relationship between higher education and schools seems to be getting closer as well.

**JS:** As we start becoming more digital, students sit beside each other and text each other. How do we help new teachers today start thinking about things like civic-mindedness? Is there some cognitive dissonance?

**BH:** I think there is some cognitive dissonance in this era between the methods of teaching and learning and the outcome we seek for the student. Methods of teaching are getting more digital at every level of learning. I encourage you to seek out young teachers in schools and young faculty in colleges and listen to their approach to teaching and their hopes for the future of their career as an academic. Their path into the role of scholar/teacher is quite distinct from the generation that still fill most leadership roles. The younger faculty I've talked with have exciting visions for their careers and their approach to working with the next generation of students. I've encouraged leaders at every institution I visit to convene their young faculty and hear their experiences and their ideas. There is a huge transition underway in the academic workforce at all levels of education.

Baby boomers now make up 40 percent of the

faculty workforce at most universities. It's clear that the majority of faculty across the country now are Gen-Xers and Millennials. We know from large-scale research of Cathy Trower (2006) that Gen-Xers and Millennials think, work, and act very differently in their responsibilities. Their distinct characteristics may be good for higher education because many of them experienced engagement in school and/or college. New generation faculty are much more collaborative and see the interdisciplinary nature of many important questions and problems. They are more inclined to be interested in both the internal and external impact and value of their scholarship. They are more likely to see teaching, learning, and

research as related activities, not as separate activities.

This is great for engagement and service-learning because they see these practices as critical for their own growth in teaching and scholarship.

These factors also may be relevant to the challenges in teacher education, the life of a teacher, the preparation of a teacher, and the treatment of a teacher in a school system. The new generation of faculty in higher education may well lead us to improvements and changes and modernization in the way we think about the preparation of school teachers. Right now there's a national crisis finding

superintendents. Community

colleges and universities are having trouble getting people to stand as presidents. Our views and forms of educational leadership also must change. I'm hoping that maybe this new generation of faculty is going to have an approach to teaching and research that starts to help us see how we will find our way toward creating better leadership for schools and a better public understanding of the role of public school teachers in our communities, just as we are using academic knowledge through engagement to tackle other public issues. It's amazing to me how much of our engagement partnerships across the

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nation has been in K-12 schools.

**JS:** Right. We have a team that is sharing their research in this issue (of *IJRSLTE*) and who illustrate your point about scholars engaging in different ways. Burrow, Cross, and Olson Beal discuss their doing their own service as faculty members through a summer project and how that enriches their teaching and their lives through self-study. It's a very interesting autoethnographic study, and it shows that changes are happening.

At Duke University, David Malone is with the International Center for Service-Learning and Teacher Education Research. David and Michaela Stith and Dane Emmerling took a look at some of the work Tania Mitchell did with critical service-learning and came up with a creative service-learning discussion tool. They can have people take a look at things like understanding systems, authentic relationships, redistribution of power, social change skills, and how to create equitable classrooms. It seems to me something like that would be a great piece for all teacher education colleges to look at and maybe even adopt.

**BH:** That's a great example of what schools of education can do to strengthen the ways they prepare students to be teachers who have skills of understanding and recognizing and pushing back against the inequities in their own classrooms. There are efforts to help teacher graduates recognize and support the diversity of their students and contribute to the equity of their learning opportunities. I don't know when we're going to be able to change the problem of the current statistics showing how few teachers stay in the field more than five years.

**JS:** What good examples are out there regarding higher education working collaboratively with local schools as an engaged initiative?

**BH:** Here is one short example. Wagner College on Staten Island has, over the last twenty-five years, transformed itself from a very traditional private college environment and student body to an extremely diverse student body and a deep involvement in schools on the island. They certainly have increased the number of students from Staten Island itself, which is interesting because it has every economic level on it, but mostly people living in lower economic circumstances. Wagner has created a partnership with a number of schools doing a variety of things. They partner with an elementary school,

an intermediate school, and a high school with university paid staff in those buildings to manage the experiences of Wagner students that come and do things in and out of classrooms with the children in a school. They work with teachers providing support and assistance, and in addition, they offer a before and after school leadership academy for school students. There are goals that guide the work with the school students, such as improving their grades and coaching and preparing them to get them ready to be successful in applying for college. I'm not describing it as incredibly as it really is, but if you go online and look at the material you'll see more about what they're doing. So that is one good example of some of what you're envisioning. Other public and private universities are doing similar programs – getting more strategic and creative in developing partnerships with schools.

**JS:** I see what you're saying. You mentioned something a little earlier on about the notion of collaboration. I've heard you talk about this in other venues and the importance of different higher education institutions coming together to be collaborative within a local area, too.

**BH:** I have heard news about a deep and strategic collaboration across the colleges and universities in Philadelphia. I don't know a lot of the detail yet, but there is definitely some buzz that cities with multiple universities and colleges are working to align their engagement with communities so as to complement and not overlap. This search for synergy has just been emerging in the last few years. Higher education institutions in cities are starting to talk to each other and trying not to trip over each other. They are trying to collaborate and work together to coordinate and have better impact. That's what gives me a sense that higher education is actually already in a process of regaining its public appreciation and value. It's clearly happening in many cities.

**JS:** I agree with you on that. What advice would you offer to people coming into this research area for the first time? What would you say to them about service-learning and community engagement? What advice would you offer them?

**BH:** I guess I think of my time at the National Service-Learning Clearinghouse. So many fantastic publications and resources came into being when we built the library. A big part of our charge was to

build and share a physical collection of publications materials that people were developing as a way to improve practice and track evidence of engagement's impact. So I draw from that experience that we need to continue to learn from each other. Today, it is important for academic institutions to develop a focused agenda of engagement. Focused engagement is more likely to be effective in supporting communities in achieving their own dreams and their own visions for their life and their neighborhoods. We also need to be much more invested in integrated research and evaluation of engaged work and partnerships in terms of what works in specific contexts. That provides new and exciting opportunities for faculty research across disciplines. That type of research would change the field by providing evidence-based information about what really works in specific settings and contexts.

**JS:** That brings me into my next question about trends. If you were to recommend any kind of new directions, do you have anything off the top of your head that you would suggest people do?

**BH:** I'm thinking of many institutions that have really upped the ante on creating greater equity and opportunity in their own student bodies and thus having greater impact on the community. The way you get to that is by being in the community and becoming a trusted institutional place where students feel they would be welcomed and supported. The dynamic is the more you get those students coming into your university then the more people you have who are inspired and skilled and able and excited to be going back into their communities and having an impact through engagement and other activities.

The other exciting new direction is transforming

the historic approach to engagement as individual partnerships developed by individual faculty and staff. If we are to create measurable and lasting change with our partners we need to be more intense and more focused in our partnerships. Engagement must align with community goals in every feasible way. Lina Dostilio at University of Pittsburgh is framing and testing a new partnership model of "hyperlocal engagement." You can see

some information about her new model on the on the CUMU web site (<https://www.cumuonline.org/>). The basic idea is to develop more intentional and focused community connections by identifying partners in a geographically-bounded area and working deeply with that neighborhood to develop highly focused work. This may well prove to increase the realization of a community's own goals for improvements and better align the involvement of higher education as community partners.

**JS:** I will definitely look for that particular site (<https://ctsi.pitt.edu/research-services/core-services/innovation/products-of-pittsburgh-podcast/community-connector-lina-dostilio/>).

**BH:** It is an interesting idea that's spreading fast. CUMU has formed a network of member institutions wanting to explore this new model of results-oriented engagement based on greater input from partners.

**JS:** We're close to the end of our time together. Is there something else that you have been thinking about that you would like to share?

**BH:** This is really an exciting time for engagement across the world. The concepts of community engagement and campus/community partnerships

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are spreading and becoming strategically important to many institutions and communities. I'm very optimistic that the new generations of faculty (many of whom had community-based experiences in their own educational path) are going to lead the work going forward. Evidence of the benefits of integrating engagement into teaching, learning, and research are growing every day. Some institutions are moving faster than others, which will eventually lead to wider involvement across all sectors.

Trower, C. (2006) Gen X meets Theory C: What new scholars want. *Journal of Collective Bargaining in the Academy*, 0 (1), Article 11. Available at: <http://thekeep.eiu.edu/jcba/vol0/iss1/11>.