



Critical Intersections: Public Scholars Creating Culture, Catalyzing Change

An Imagining America Research Report

Erica Kohl-Arenas, Kal Alston, and Christina Preston

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Introduction

Working against the grain of institutional reward structures and disciplinary norms, public scholars¹ have long recognized that impactful research on real-world problems requires imaginative, interdisciplinary, collaborative methods grounded in communities. In a three-year research project funded by the Mellon Foundation, a diverse inter-generational team of Imagining America (IA) researchers found that public scholars lead the way in delivering on university commitments to serve the public good. Through over one hundred individual interviews, twenty multimedia case studies, a national graduate scholar survey, an online study group, and public conversations, we learned how public scholars have historically and consistently conducted research that matters – responding to urgent challenges in the world, including on the pressing ecological, social, racial, and economic justice issues of our time. Yet, we also found that most academic institutions are still not designed to support this important work. By favoring narrow disciplinary boundaries and norms as well as individualized methods over collective commitments and reciprocal partnerships, most institutions marginalize public scholarship through outdated reward systems and bureaucratic obstacles. We also found that despite these limitations, public scholars based in colleges and universities survive and thrive in the corners of the academy transforming institutional cultures and norms from the inside out.

Much of this transformative work, as well as the accompanying challenges, takes place at the critical intersections where scholars of color, and those from other traditionally marginalized backgrounds, are radically expanding how we understand research and who is considered a producer of knowledge. In academic institutions, as George Sanchez has noted in IA's 2004 *Foreseeable Futures* publication, "faculty of color experience a more difficult context where they are pulled between the commitments to communities of color almost all bring with them to the academy and the departmental culture which tells them, either directly or mostly indirectly, to abandon those ties or risk professional suicide." This is especially true for faculty whose public scholarship involves deep engagement with community stakeholders and regional issues and where the lines of teaching, service, scholarship, and identity are deeply intertwined. Similarly, IA's *Full Participation* (Eatman, Saltmarsh, Sturm, and Bush 2011) research shows how the imperatives for supporting faculty diversity, student success, and public scholarship are often interconnected. Yet, institutional offices that deliver on these commitments remain siloed and obstructed.

Out of both necessity and brilliance, scholars at these critical intersections have created centers and institutes, cultures of peer support and mentorship, models for effective, engaged research and artmaking, innovations in pedagogy and mentorship, new approaches

¹ The term 'Public Scholarship' is used here to include those who identify as public, activist and/or engaged scholars from university and community-based settings. We recognize that this includes a broad range of work with different implications for each approach and note that shared themes emerged across these different approaches. Imagining America's working definition of public scholarship includes scholarly and creative activity that aims to produce new knowledge and elevate a diversity of voices and wisdom with and for diverse publics and communities beyond higher education. Through purposeful and often collaborative research and artmaking, public scholarship produces concrete artifacts of intellectual, creative, social, and political value to diverse constituents and communities beyond the boundaries of specific scholarly and artistic disciplines.

to ethical peer and institutional review, innovative public programming, and scholarly production, and pathways for diverse faculty and staff members to move into decision making positions in the academy. From the Third World Liberation Front of the 1960s that “recognized that knowledge constitutes a terrain of struggle in its own right, one that can be advanced only through practical-critical activity that bridges the divide between the university and our communities” (Hernandez 2022), to the movement scholars of our time, to public humanities, engaged design, and community arts practitioners, students, scholars, and community-based researchers have called for higher education to expand what is valued, recognized, and resourced as rigorous research, knowledge production and dissemination.

The call to change practices in the academy to better understand and support public scholarship is not new. In 2008 Imagining America published *Scholarship in Public: Knowledge Creation and Tenure Policy in the Engaged University* (Ellison and Eatman), which focused on expanding the traditional routes to recognition and rewards for faculty engaged in public scholarship. Fourteen years later, some things have changed. Often inspired by this report and advocacy from IA leadership, many institutions have revised faculty handbooks and tenure policies, including leaders in the field such as the University of Minnesota, Purdue University, University of North Carolina Greensboro, and Occidental College. Several organizations, from Campus Compact to Big Ten Academic Alliance, have launched initiatives to push these advances in faculty reward policies further. At the same time, a growing body of scholarship continues to make a case for further change (O’Meara, K., Templeton, L., Culpepper, D. & White-Lewis, D. 2022).

We are seeing a new wave of public and activist scholars mobilizing the resources and connective spaces of the university for community, movement, and social and environmental causes. Scholars for Social Justice, the Public Scholarship in Action Collective, many institution-based programs such as UCLA’s Institute on Inequality and Democracy or The New School’s University in Exile, and many more are transforming the process of knowledge production by building public research agendas and alliances between universities and communities.

Although there is much to celebrate, our research found that one of the biggest obstacles to change is academic culture itself, a realm seldom addressed systematically. This report provides an overview of IA’s three-year research project designed to better understand these obstacles and how to shift academic institutional culture to support and appreciate public scholarship more fully. To understand and document change strategies, we first needed to uncover the aspects of academic cultures that marginalize this work. Through pilot research in 2019, we conducted interviews with 27 high-level academic administrators from across the country with a demonstrated commitment to institutional change on behalf of public scholarship. Interestingly, most of these administrators did not believe that significant change is taking place from the top down, centering problematic institutional histories and ongoing bureaucratic practices ‘baked in’ to the structure of the academy. From histories of theft of Indigenous lands or profits from the slave trade increasingly recognized today, to

institutional logics, financial priorities, and hierarchical frameworks that reproduce unequal treatment of public, activist, and engaged scholars – we heard a lot about the reluctant, slow-moving nature of academic institutions. They also shared specific ways in which century-old disciplinary norms and departmental behaviors present challenges for engaged scholars of color, first-generation academics, and women. While our project was not designed to study the institutional structure or political economies of higher education, these realities provided a context and a starting point to further shape the research questions and methods. It also informed the design of our qualitative study of the grounded experiences of public scholars and community-based collaborators.

In our three years of research, we consistently heard that the most enduring challenges lie within the *everyday life of the university*.² Most prominently, we heard about how a competitive peer culture, bureaucratic challenges, and advising to guide graduate scholars and junior faculty marginalize engaged, public, and most prominently activist approaches to research. Strikingly, we found that even internationally and nationally prominent public scholars experience these challenges. Beyond understanding the barriers, we were interested in how public scholars, engaged graduate scholars, administrative allies, and advocates create change. This was the most gratifying aspect of our research and is the focus of much of this report. We invite you to read the following pages as a glimpse into the future, where public scholars and collaborators are creating new meaning, building relationships, and forging partnerships that transform the possibilities of university-community research and art making.

In this report, we provide an overview of the research agenda, the research and dialogue methodologies engaged, and findings from one aspect of the research: interviews with fifty change-oriented administrators, public scholars, and community-based culture keepers. The stories told here are the result of the wisdom and experiences of these generous individuals, interviewed by the lead research team: Erica Kohl-Arenas, Kal Alston, and Christina Preston. We also recognize research conducted by two engaged graduate scholars, Lizbeth De La Cruz Santana and Alana Stein, to better understand the challenges and opportunities of engaged graduate scholars at UC Davis. De La Cruz Santana and Stein have produced a separate report, which provides a detailed discussion of research aims, methods, findings, and recommendations (De La Cruz Santana and Stein, 2022). Similarly, Gale Greenlee and D. Romo conducted an in-depth study as part of this research initiative to better understand the experiences of graduate scholars in IA's Publicly Active Graduate Education program. Greenlee and Romo will publish a report of their findings, including results from a national survey of engaged graduate scholars in 2023. The graduate scholar reports include findings from a combined 50 interviews along with a national survey.

Additionally, multi-media case studies were solicited from our broader IA community as demonstrations of what is possible in expanding how we understand research and

² Throughout this Report, “university” will often stand in for a variety of types of institutions of higher education, even as we acknowledge other institutional forms, including professional associations, that support and/or limit public scholarship.

knowledge production at critical university-community intersections. Throughout the 2019-2022 research period, online study groups and public conversations broadened and deepened our understanding of the themes emerging from the research.

In the following pages, we briefly contextualize this research project within scholarly conversations directly relevant to our study. Next, we outline the specific research questions and methods, followed by a research findings section. We conclude with a discussion on the next steps for Imagining America, including plans to use the research findings towards campus culture change.

Critical Conversations on Culture Change on Behalf of Public Scholarship

From the groundbreaking collection of public scholar essays in *Engaging Contradictions: Theory, Politics, and Methods of Activist Scholarship* (Hale 2008), to Julia Sudbury and Margo Okazawa-Rey's *Activist Scholarship: Antiracism, Feminism, and Social Change* (2009), to Patricia Hill Collins' *On Intellectual Activism* (2013), to Michelle Fine's *Just Research in Contentious Times: Widening the Methodological Imagination* (2017), and Collete Cann and Eric DeMeulenaere's *The Activist Academic: Engaged Scholarship for Resistance, Hope and Social Change* (2020), there is a growing body of scholarship that makes a case for the epistemological strength and rigor of research that is conducted in careful and long-term collaboration with communities and movements most impacted by the issues under investigation. An essential contribution to this conversation is Black feminist and Indigenous-led teachings that have long highlighted how academic cultures and disciplines produce hierarchies that marginalize scholars of color who bring specific identities, histories, and community-based theories, methods, and commitments to their work. They propose a way forward that centers values of trust, respect, equitable and reflective research practices, reciprocal relationships of care within and beyond the academy, and the cultivation of diverse identities across university-community lines (Tuck 2009, hooks 1989, Grant, Woodson and Dumas 2020, Smith 2012).

This body of scholarship provides rich resources for public and engaged scholars, including but not limited to innovative research designs that engage theories from a wide range of cultures and experiences, tools for building authentic relationships and sustainable research partnerships, methods that enable data collection and analysis with a diversity of stakeholders, and measures to hold research accountable to concrete community outcomes. Many of these authors recount their experiences and detail how participatory and engaged research practices have more significant and lasting impacts. Their work centers grounded conversations about ethics, accountability, transparency, and researcher positionality in university and community-based settings. As you will read in the following pages, our research revealed similar lessons as shared in this scholarship, with a sharpened focus on how to change campus culture on behalf of public scholars.

Beyond research on the strength of the methods and practices of public scholarship, most of our research subjects contextualized their daily experiences within a historicized understanding of academic institutional structures. In line with what was shared in our pilot research above is a growing field of study sometimes termed Critical University Studies (Boggs and Mitchell 2018) that asks the university and its people to reckon with histories of dispossession, such as higher education's entanglement with an enduring legacy of slavery (Wilder 2013, Williams, Squire and Tuitt, 2021), colonization (Patel 2005), theft of land from Indigenous peoples (Lee and Ahtone 2020), gentrification and displacement (Baldwin 2021), ongoing relationship with the production of war (Maira 2018), and the shifting of debt onto students and families (Martin and Dwyer 2021). This body of scholarship often also recognizes how advancements in equity and social justice have been catalyzed and might be organized through academic institutions (hooks 1989, Hale 2008, Patel 2021, la paperson 2017, Lorgia Peña 2022, Chatterjee and Maira 2014, Carney 2016, Valenzuela 2017). This approach requires that we simultaneously resist reifying academic institutions as inherently endowed with democratic valor to serve the public good while placing a high value on the power of public knowledge making and the university's unique capacity to serve as a catalyst for social change. Whether through the formation of new centers and offices, revised policies and procedures, collaborative projects, and initiatives within and beyond the classroom, or through the 'bolt holes and breathing spaces' that 'hotwire' the system towards radical possibility (Webb 2018, la paperson 2017), universities can be hopeful sites of democratic learning and action. We follow this more nuanced approach to understanding institutional change. In keeping with this scholarship, the research team sought out evidence of projects that bridge university-community knowledge production and counter the histories of harm done by academic institutions referenced above.

An important thread in this conversation concerns the emotional and physical labor required of community and movement-aligned researchers (Fine 2017) and the necessity to build peer support systems among scholar-practitioners who embrace activist, engaged, and public scholarship approaches to research. As is beautifully told by Lorgia García Peña in *Community as Rebellion: A Syllabus for Surviving Academic as a Woman of Color* (2022) and Victoria Reyes in *Academic Outsider: Stories of Exclusion and Hope* (2022), these spaces are especially critical for scholars from traditionally marginalized backgrounds who find themselves further challenged when choosing to engage in collaborative, community-oriented research methods not understood or appreciated by traditional disciplinary gatekeepers.

One commonly used way of describing these supportive institutional spaces is as an 'undercommons' (Harney and Moten 2013) where specifically activist and movement-aligned scholars engage in a set of practices that build supportive relationships, collective power, and a safe space to produce radical research. Harney and Moten take the position that undercommons scholars experience a necessarily 'fugitive' relationship to the academy as they work in 'marooned' communities set up to avoid cooptation and control from the institutional center. Others who use the term 'undercommons' more loosely describe the many supportive corners, centers, and hybrid spaces occupied by engaged and activist scholars (Patel and Buchanan 2019). Running through these perspectives is an analysis

of power and marginalization along the intersections of race, class, gender, and ability, often with a focus on how efforts to institutionalize 'diversity, equity, and inclusion,' fail to recognize the fundamental demands of engaged scholars of color, translating demands into moderate frameworks and leadership practices (Ferguson 2012).

A wider ranging set of ideas and conversations broadly relate to our study, including on the college classroom as a space of hope and possibility (hooks 1994, Garcia Peña 2022, Patel 2021), on the history of student protest (Ferguson 2017, Douglas, Shockley, Toldson 2020, Rogers 2012) and rising student debt (Appel 2015, Taylor 2020), on the history of engaged or activist disciplines such as ethnic studies (Okihiro 2016), on academia and structures of racism in general (Meleaku and Beeman 2020, Bates and Ng 2021, Dennis 2001, Williams, Squire and Tuitt 2021), and on the conflicted roles of administrators, especially leaders of color, attempting to create transformation rather than incremental change (Hodges and Welch 2018, Reyes 2022, Favors 2019, Hrabowski 2019). The research engaged in this section is shared to recognize the depth and breadth of scholarship in these fields and to provide a general context for our research design and findings. It is not a complete literature review and will be expanded upon in future writings associated with this project.

Research and Engagement Methodologies

Research Goals

With funding from the Mellon Foundation, the three-year research initiative then named the Leading and Learning Initiative (LLI)³ was launched at the Leadership Forum of Imagining America's (IA) 2019 National Gathering in Albuquerque, New Mexico. At this event, the research team⁴ shared the hopes and goals of the LLI and engaged in dialogue with members of a newly formed Leadership Cohort.⁵ The main objectives of this initiative included the following:

1. Produce and present original actionable research that holds institutions of higher education accountable to support public scholarship that engages the methodologies of art, design, and humanities.
2. Connect and convene a national network of campus and associational leaders and graduate student scholars committed to public scholarship to guide the research and build a collective multi-faceted voice towards advocacy and action.

³ The initial name, Leading and Learning Initiative (LLI), did not, in the end, resonate with our research findings which are more accurately captured in the title of this report, *Critical Intersections: Public Scholars Creating Culture, Catalyzing Change*. We use the acronym LLI when describing the bounded period in which we conducted research but will not be using this name going forward.

⁴ Principal Investigator Erica Kohl-Arenas, Co-PI Kal Alston, and Research Associate Christina Preston.

⁵ Nancy Cantor, Mari Castañeda, Joy Connolly, Lizbeth De La Cruz Santana, Maryrose Flannigan, David Theo Goldberg, Gale Greenlee, Ralph Hexter, Tessa Hicks Peterson, Stephen Kidd, Paula Krebs, Earl Lewis, Christopher Long, Teresa Mangum, Katherine McComas, Caryn McTighe-Musil, Brain Murphy, KerryAnn O'Meara, Leigh Patel, John Powell, Michael Rios, Verdis Robinson, D. Romo, Stephanie Rowe, George Sanchez, Alana Stein, Julie Sze, Rowena Tomaneng, Angel Ysaguirre.

3. Produce interactive guides, resources, and media that students, scholars, and leaders can use to advocate for change towards greater support of public scholarship, with compelling examples of how to do so.

I Qualitative Stakeholder Interviews

With feedback from the Leadership Cohort in the fall of 2019, we refined the research agenda and developed questions for preliminary interviews with twenty-seven campus and associational leaders committed to institutional change, conducted during the winter of 2020. The primary purpose of these pilot interviews was to collect first-hand accounts of the following:

1. The aspects of institutional life that marginalize activist and public scholarship, which are most stubbornly resistant to change.
2. What institutional change looks like in practice through small or large-scale examples.
3. The most effective approaches to organizing and catalyzing institutional change, including key strategies and frameworks for addressing entrenched institutional culture traits that marginalize and discourage activist and public scholarship.

In the 2020-2021 project year, we conducted an additional twenty-three interviews, fifty in total, with a revised interview protocol based on a qualitative analysis of the pilot interviews. All interview subjects were guaranteed anonymity while reserving the right to return to specific individuals for approval to share compelling quotes and stories. Each interview was conducted online, recorded both on Zoom and through a recording device. The recordings were sent for transcription and the team analyzed the text transcripts.

Having mapped the perspectives of academics in leadership positions, we were eager to document the obstacles and opportunities experienced by institutional public scholars and community-based collaborators. In this second round of interviews, we included 1) public and activist scholars whose primary location is inside the university; 2) artists, scholars, and cultural leaders whose primary identification is outside of higher education but who have partnered with others within; and 3) additional noteworthy institutional leaders.

We sought a grounded understanding of the obstacles to recognition, respect, and recompense for knowledge production in public and activist scholarship and the conditions necessary for producing public, engaged, and activist research and artistic practice, dissemination, and impact. Because we were interested in learning from those who have the most direct experience with enduring challenges as well as demonstrated approaches to transforming the academy, we prioritized interviewing public scholars of color as they experience specific structural contradictions in the academy and have made significant contributions to public scholarship, as described above and further highlighted in the pilot

interviews. The interviewees for the second round were identified using several methods. Using a snowball method, we asked our pilot interviewees to recommend exemplary public scholars, collaborators, and allies. We also identified individuals based on the known impact of their work, either through noteworthy projects and publications or recommendations from the IA network. As a qualitative exploratory study, the aim was not to select a random sample but rather to identify individuals with sufficient experience organizing public scholarship projects and change efforts in keeping with the research project's goals.

Based on the emergent themes and key findings from our pilot research, the second phase of interviews focused primarily on the broad questions below:

1. How might the experiences of public and activist BIPOC, women, queer, and community-based scholars and culture keepers radically expand our understanding of knowledge production?
 - a. How have these scholars made ideas travel from academic research into the public sphere and social change agendas? What are the most powerful ideas and methodologies for organizing change?
 - b. How are activist, engaged, and traditionally marginalized knowledge producers building relationships and power to challenge patterns of inequality and exclusion within and across campus-community lines?
2. How do we center public and activist faculty, staff, students, and community-based researchers and artists in the university change agenda?
 - a. What are the most effective strategies utilized by institutional leaders who are committed to brokering change on behalf of public and activist scholars along racial, gender, and other critical social lines?
 - b. How do institutional leaders make sense of and negotiate the structural contradictions embedded within their roles and identities within institutions often resistant to change?
 - c. How can catalysts who wield power from the outside put pressure on higher education?
3. How might the creative methodologies and forms of knowledge production in the arts, design, and humanities make higher education more responsive to public needs while also strengthening opportunities and learning for scholars, teachers, staff, and students?
 - a. What role does critical pedagogy and engaged learning play in shifting campus culture?

- b. What role do truly reciprocal campus initiatives play in shifting norms of knowledge production and recognition?
- c. What are the current opportunities and challenges to producing engaged art, design, and humanities work on pressing public issues today?

Following these questions, we designed open-ended qualitative interview protocols for each respondent category: scholars/artists, community-based collaborators, and institutional leaders (see Appendix). In total, we interviewed twenty-five administrators, seventeen scholars/artists, and eight community-based cultural leaders and scholars. These categories were not fixed as most interviewees occupied more than one of these categories. For example, most administrators are also faculty, and most community collaborators taught courses or held fellowships with academic institutions.

I Graduate Scholar Research

The research effort also included two studies conducted by and for graduate students, and addressed the opportunities and challenges experienced by public, engaged, and activist graduate scholars who use the methodologies of arts, design, and humanities. During the summer of 2020, Lizbeth De La Cruz Santana (Doctoral Candidate, Spanish and Portuguese, UC Davis) and Alana Stein (Doctoral Candidate, Sociology, UC Davis) conducted thirty in-depth interviews with engaged graduate scholars studying at or recently graduated from the University of California, Davis (IA's host campus). Published by Imagining America in the fall of 2022, the analysis of the semi-structured qualitative interviews described in *Navigating the Joys and Challenges of Public Scholarship in Graduate School* (De La Cruz Santana and Stein) reveal similar patterns as described in this report.

The LLI also commissioned a research project conducted by IA's Publicly Active Graduate Education (PAGE) program alumni and former PAGE co-directors D. Romo and Gale Greenlee, which included over twenty interviews, online conversations, and a national survey to explore graduate students' experiences and educational journeys at their institutions and through sponsored programs and initiatives. This project highlights (a) the importance of, need for, and benefits of publicly engaged scholarship, (b) institutional and campus culture challenges/barriers that constrain community-engaged, public, and activist scholarship among graduate students, and (c) the spaces, communities, and individuals through which public, community-engaged, and activist graduate student scholarship is valued, cultivated, and supported. Greenlee and Romo's report are forthcoming from IA in 2023.

I Stories of Change Case Studies

In early 2021, we launched a call for submissions for the Stories of Change Project to document and share powerful examples of public scholarship and campus culture change efforts. The team received over 100 applicants and selected 20 exemplary projects with the assistance of LLI advisors, Angel Ysaguirre and Teresa Mangum. The multimedia creations and written narratives will be featured on the IA website and shared through social media. The intent of the Stories of Change case study project is to further address our research questions by showing the varied and meaningful contributions and collaborations between communities and public scholars, focusing on the arts, design, and humanities. These case studies demonstrated the variety of methods and modalities that public scholarship employs to deepen understanding and address a wide range of complex issues, such as the oppressive policing of communities of color, the impact of Alzheimer's and other dementias on undocumented Latinx families living in the U.S., and the need to create online spaces of joy for Queer-Crip communities on and off campus. These projects emphasized the importance, vitality, capacity, and dynamic outcomes of public and activist scholars working alongside communities to address real world problems.

I Forums, Study Groups and Webinars

In addition to conducting interviews and surveys and collecting case studies, the research team organized and hosted virtual study groups and webinars about critical aspects of the research. The first conversation in the winter of 2020 featured KerryAnn O'Meara and Kal Alston, who led an interactive discussion on the relationship between diversity, equity, inclusion, and public scholarship. The distance between institutional mission statements that tout 'equity and inclusion' and the lived experience of graduate students and faculty can be painfully large. This webinar reflected on the current state of diversity and inclusion work on academic campuses, and the relationship between engaged teaching and scholarship. In collaboration with The Globalsl Network, IA hosted Wayne Yang (aka la paperson) to discuss their book *A Third University is Possible* (2017), which presents a framework for organizing universities towards the practical work of decolonization. Facilitated by Jack Tchen and Erica Kohl-Arenas, the discussion centered on how the global COVID-19 pandemic put pressures on communities, higher education systems, and societies in ways unprecedented in our lifetimes. Participants explored strategies to hold fast to the values that advance the practical work of decolonization during this era of rupture. In the summer of 2020, we hosted a sold-out live conversation with Colette Cann and Eric J. DeMeulenaere, with discussants John Saltmarsh and Margo Okazawa-Rey, to discuss their recently released book, *The Activist Academic: Engaged Scholarship for Resistance, Hope and Social Change* (2020).

In 2021, Dr. Rowena M. Tomaneng, President of San José City College, led a session that applied Social Movement Theory to change institutional cultures built upon racism and domination. Dr. Tomaneng shared lessons from her many years leading culture change for student equity within the California Community College system. Drawing upon her book

No Study Without Struggle: Confronting Settler Colonialism in Higher Education (2021), University of Pittsburg Professor Leigh Patel facilitated an online study group to explore the critical ways in which study and struggle for social change have been linked, historically and today. With examples from political education in social movements and their public pedagogies, participants discussed how social change has happened in their lives and the possibilities for change in higher education. In 2021, the research effort also hosted a panel with nationally recognized leaders in creating innovative centers and programs to support public scholarship, including Barbara Ransby, Margo Okazawa-Rey, and Stacey Sutton, facilitated by Erica Kohl-Arenas. The graduate scholar research teams hosted live webinars in 2020 and 2021 to share preliminary findings and engage in dialogue with peers.

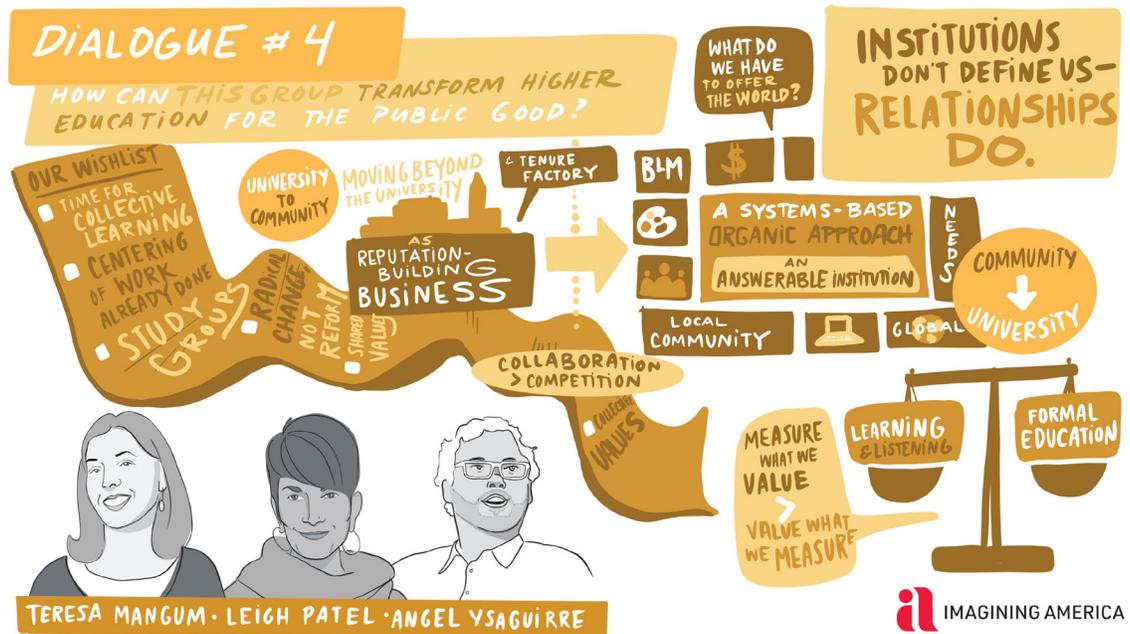
In 2022, Tessa Hicks Peterson, Assistant Vice President for Community Engagement at Pitzer College, hosted a webinar to explore concepts, tools, and practices for greater healing in our work for personal and social change in the academy. Christopher Long, Dean of the College of Arts and Letters, Michigan State University, and Nicky Agate of the University of Pennsylvania Libraries, led a session on creating values-based approaches to tenure and promotion based on their popular HuMetricsHSS Initiative. These sessions enriched the conversation and deepened the analysis for both researchers and participants.



Graphic facilitation image by Abby VanMuijen from 2020 LLI Organizing Institute.

Organizing Institutes

In addition to the data collection and dialogue efforts, the research team organized and facilitated annual ‘Organizing Institutes’ to build a peer learning network, share proposals, and receive feedback from the national Leadership Cohort. The first Organizing Institute was held in conjunction with the IA National Gathering in Albuquerque, New Mexico in the fall of 2019. At this event, the research team shared the goals of the research initiative with the Leadership Cohort and campus leaders from the IA network while also engaging participants in feedback and brainstorming. Initially intended as annual in-person retreats, Organizing Institutes were held online in the spring of 2020 and the winter of 2022 due to the limits presented by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The 2020 Organizing Institute facilitated mini dialogues between advisors, and presented preliminary findings from the pilot research phase. A winter 2022 event featured interactive group work on how to translate research findings into advocacy messages, tools, and resources. The Leadership Cohort gathers for the second in-person Organizing Institute at the IA National Gathering in New Orleans, October 14-16, 2022. This final event will engage the advisors in a workshop to test the high-level messages and interactive tools that emerged from the research, and to brainstorm ways to share the research with institutional change agents across the country.



Graphic facilitation image by Abby VanMuijen from 2020 LLI Organizing Institute.

Research Findings

Introduction

One of the main insights from the pilot interviews, designed to answer baseline questions about how academic institutions do or do not support public scholarship, was that the contexts that our respondents most often discussed were cultural. That is, the everyday values, norms, behaviors, and practices enacted in academic institutions were visible to many, while institutional structures were less frequently discussed. This is perhaps because the way academic institutions work operationally is often not made visible. As we selected our second round of interviewees, we looked for those who could make sense of the cultural and structural exclusions and barriers in academic institutions and tell stories of how to make change inside, outside, and across higher education. This required that we find a diversity of public scholars and artists with longstanding commitments and projects, community members outside of academic institutions with experience partnering with academic public scholars, and additional internal administrative brokers.

Beyond the critical analysis of higher education, we were interested in hearing stories from those who embody, represent, or expand relationships with communities deeply affected by the long-standing and urgent conditions of our time, calling for social, racial, ecological justice and repair. In other words, the research aims required that we find people working on pressing issues over the long haul and whose work has made a significant impact. While we heard some heart-twisting stories of dismissal, delegitimizing, and lack of care, we also heard fervent expressions of hope and love for the possibilities these individuals found in relationships with others and within the institutions where they have worked, invested, and struggled.

We had our struggles as a research team – coming to grips with how we would operationalize ‘public scholarship’ (or not, as we decided), given that those with whom we were engaging had a variety of commitments, methodologies, and approaches. We also wanted to be careful to acknowledge that ‘community’ is itself multi-various and not always ‘outside’ of the university. Many of our respondents with campus affiliations considered themselves part of one or more communities that reside in some form of a borderland – sometimes in connection to a shared identity or history and sometimes by virtue of long-haul commitments and relationships. We began and proceeded with a strong view that the scholarly heft of tools used in the humanities, arts, and design were central to our project. As Imagining America believes, creative culture is an important site of liberation. The bold power of art and design holds the key to bringing people together in imagining and embodying a better future. Creative practices force us to suspend belief, step outside of dead-end thinking, and imagine a different way of being. Collaborative creative culture-making brings people together in ways that foster empathy, joy, play, and connection. Tellingly, while we interviewed several individuals who do not identify with creative disciplines, their accounts almost always centered storytelling and narrative approaches when building partnerships and creating change across university-community lines.

We did our research during a worldwide pandemic. The impacts of COVID-19 were omnipresent throughout our project, presenting an array of unprecedented societal, familial, economic, and political challenges locally and globally. The pandemic impacted research timelines, as many interviewees were dealing with pressing campus and community issues and had to push interview dates back by several months. In the end, however, COVID-19 did not affect the willingness of our interviewees to speak openly about their challenges and opportunities. Several interviewees noted that despite the slow-moving nature of academic institutions, COVID brought out its version of rapid response and change. Beginning in March 2020, the ability of these otherwise stolid organisms to pivot was made quite visible. When leaders understood that institutional survival was on the line, they put their minds to make changes 'for the good of the order.' Observing that capacity for institutional flexibility (even when outcomes were challenging and problematic) helped interviewees to realize a broader rationale for institutional change to lift practices of public, engaged, and activist research, scholarship, collaboration, and attention to justice.



Graphic facilitation image by Abby VanMuijen from 2020 LLI Organizing Institute.

I Findings from Fifty Stakeholder Interviews

As described in the research methods section, between 2019-2022, the research team (Kohl-Arenas, Alston, and Preston) conducted 50 semi-structured qualitative interviews (with 48 individuals) with academic administrators, academic public scholars and artists, and community-based artists, scholars and culture keepers. In many cases, interviewees occupied more than one category, which was not a problem as we were primarily

interested in gaining a multi-faceted view of grounded experience and not comparisons between types of people. All interview subjects were guaranteed anonymity, while we also reserved the right to return to specific individuals for approval to share compelling quotes and stories in future publications and media. Each interview was conducted online by one of the research team members and recorded on Zoom and through a recording device. We characterized potential interviewees into primary role categories: twenty-eight institutional administrators, fourteen academic public/activist scholars and artists, and eight community-based artists and culture bearers. This breakdown follows our primary focus on understanding the problems and opportunities associated with academic institutions. Thirty of the interviewees identified as female, and eighteen as male. Twenty-two were identified as white, and twenty-six as scholars, artists, or administrators of color. The recordings were sent for transcription for the research team's qualitative analysis of the text transcripts. The data analysis process involved individual thematic coding by the three research team members, two three-hour data analysis meetings where team members shared, organized, and re-coded themes, and then additional analysis of notes and categories from the facilitated meeting.

From this data analysis process, we arrived at *Five Meaning Making Statements* representing the highest level of qualitative coding. After a rigorous analysis of interview transcripts, these themes emerged the most frequently and with the most depth:

1. There is individual and collective damage done and limits set by the enduring structures and cultures of higher education that do not understand, recognize, or support public scholars. This damage has created trauma, wounds, and compromises across university and community lines.
2. These structures and cultures are maintained through specific disciplinary, bureaucratic, and extra-institutional practices.
3. Yet, public scholars are finding ways to survive and thrive by creating spaces of peer support, learning, care, and wayfinding.
4. The theories, methods, practices, and outcomes of public scholarship itself leads the way in transforming the academy towards a place that recognizes and values a wider range of knowers and producers of research, wisdom, and knowledge.
5. To confront the enduring problems, demands must also be made, and approaches that involve interruption of business as usual are critical in these times.

In the remainder of this section, we further describe each emergent theme, collapsing some and expanding upon others based on what has already been shared in this report. Beyond the discussion of the findings shared here, the research team is analyzing each theme alongside findings from the larger research project (including the graduate scholar research, case studies, and dialogues) and developing the next level of synthesis in future writing.

The interviews revealed an inside glimpse into the structures and cultures of higher education that marginalize public scholarship, as maintained through specific mechanisms.

Common themes emerged across the interviews, with people across primary role categories often citing the same mechanisms of marginalization. The most often cited challenge by academic based public scholars, artists, and administrators who advocate for public scholars, was disciplinary norms and boundaries that disproportionately reward and favor traditional disciplinary gatekeepers (often white people) over interdisciplinary public, engaged and activist scholars (often people of color). We also heard, across all three interview categories, about the bureaucratic rules, regulations, and administrative hurdles that present serious challenges for those engaging in community-based and movement-aligned research. The difficulty in bringing academic resources to communities, whether to pay a collaborator or to support a community-based institution, was high on the list of grievances. Our respondents also surfaced ongoing concerns about economic and political reach into communities through large-scale development projects, gentrification, policing, and extractive research. These patterns informed how research is often impeded by histories of broken promises and lack of trust of academic institutions as worthy partners. Another critique sharply focused on institutional investments in diversity, equity, and inclusion that suggest intervention but create alternative bureaucratic structures that extract time and energy without disrupting problematic institutional practices. These structures were described as hierarchical and set up to benefit the university and not those who work and study there or external partners.

We repeatedly heard about how these patterns produce a striking contradiction between stated and operationalized institutional values. Institutions often claim to value community-engaged, collaborative, diverse, social change, and equity-based work in their missions yet internally organize around the norms and structures that reward individualism, competition, prestige, assimilation, and the status quo. Throughout the interviews, we heard different variations on the narrative that even as colleges and universities publicly recognize engaged, public, and activist scholarship, they most often do not alter institutional structures or culture to recognize and reward this work.

As one long-time public scholar explained,

“So, on the one hand, I am all for universities building in more incentives and taking away the obstacles. On the other hand, I’m increasingly seeing perversions of how universities embrace community-based work. We’re on the cover of every brochure, but we’re denied space. Or the people we do research with are followed by police around the university. Or the IRB. Or our grants... People won’t let us pay youth researchers. Or they won’t let them take the ethics training and get listed as legitimate co-researchers. They still treat it like charity and not justice and certainly not knowledge production.”

a fixed, mainly Western European and white vision of the production of knowledge and research excellence. Narrow conceptions of what meaningful research can look like are often carefully contained and managed by traditional disciplinary peers. As vividly recounted in the graduate student interviews associated with this research, transmission of these ideas and attitudes usually begin during graduate school, influencing and limiting the scope and type of research conducted by early career activist, public, and engaged scholars. These attitudes affect admissions, program structure, and advisement that exclude or discourage those with the ambition to work in partnership with communities or public imperatives, or to speak from the standpoint of their own cultures and communities. As a result, many are encouraged to do this work in the margins or to abandon it altogether. These limitations are often accompanied by feelings of fear, isolation, and competition, which result in toxic work cultures and exacerbate individualized mental health struggles rather than acknowledging collective problems. For example, one interviewee explains how academic culture erases other ways of knowing and speaking,

“So much of my education took place in informal spaces. We spend so much time when we get to a doctoral program trying to recover those things that have been systematically excised from our daily practice. And that alienates us from not just our pasts, but our homes and our families and our ability to accurately engage in those previously learned knowledge-making practices. When you’re on language patrol, what you’re doing is an act of violence against my relationship to language.” - A.D. Carson

At the heart of these patterns is a persistent lack of understanding or a refusal to recognize, among the most strident disciplinary gatekeepers, the value of the diverse epistemologies, methodologies, theories, norms, practices, and values of rigorous engaged, public, and activist research and meaning making. Because scholars with urgent and longstanding community-based and movement commitments often require longer timelines, resource allocation to non-institutional partners, a wider range of peers and evaluators, and collaborative approaches to designing research, conducting fieldwork, and analyzing data that are often unaccounted for within slow-moving, and ultimately, conservative institutions, engaged scholarship is often misevaluated and categorized as service or volunteerism. The more political and activist forms of public scholarship are often discouraged entirely. Interviewees shared how these institutional values and behaviors constraining research are fundamentally inter-connected and further exacerbated along the lines of race, gender, ability, and socio-economic class. One internationally recognized public scholar related their experience of disciplinary trauma, particularly imposed by peers:

“I am the first African American to be tenured in the department's history. It's 2021; I got tenure in 2018. Only one other Black person ever worked in this department [who] stayed for a year. So, when people tell me about the progress that's being made in higher education, in my unique experience in the department where I worked most of my career, I did not have that experience; I felt like I was pushing a boulder up a mountain all the time. And when I went up for tenure, I had a split vote, half of the faculty voted against me

irrespective of my record of productivity and work in the world and the academy, and I had to appeal that to the campus level to get tenure."

Several graduate scholars and faculty scholars interviewed expressed how disciplinary gate keepers and the university itself are most resistant to the specifically activist orientations to public scholarship:

"The university is hospitable to the least political manifestations of engaged scholarship and activist scholarship. What I find the university to be absolutely inhospitable to, is anything that calls out the university's own role in reproducing racial capitalism. It's lovely if we want to go into 'quote-unquote' marginalized communities and do some good there. But if we really have had more scrutiny and shared scrutiny into the university's role as a gentrifying agent, the university's role in extractive research, the university's role in producing the racist algorithms that pop up or policing and militarization. Well, that stuff is not at all tolerated."

A community-based interviewee further describes this dynamic,

"Of course, like I said, the exploitation by researchers, there is the ideal and increases in justification because universities increase property values, etcetera. And increasing the police due to university development. We kind of have that situation right now around [a] building that's right next door to. . . our theatre. And there's so much policing in the area because of that building. . . I don't know if the community has benefited or not benefited from that existential stretch of [that] police department. So, because there was no meeting, there was no conversation. . . . The police department from the university never sat down with community leaders to say, 'Hey, we're gonna have an increased presence, we're gonna be around, we're gonna do this, we're gonna do that.' And that's often the case, that there are no academic community partnerships that start with, 'Here's what we are thinking about, here's what we'd like to do.' It was a land grab, and once the land is grabbed, it's like the rules are put down, and it's just, deal with it."

In addition to the challenges presented by disciplinary norms, peer blocking behaviors, and community-level interventions, we were struck by the number of mentions of the everyday grind of the academic bureaucracy, and institutional rules and procedures not set up to support public scholarship. Researchers often spend a great deal of time explaining projects and rationales to frontline administrative staff. Most of the institutional leaders / administrators interviewed explained this lack of change by describing universities and colleges as conservative, slow-moving, overly bureaucratic, and highly resistant to change. Most public and engaged scholars are likely nodding their heads at this point, with memories of the repeated 'no's' and 'we can't do that' responses to requests to recognize, reward, and resource community-based partners and projects. We heard that constant hurdles and paperwork burn people out and can ultimately make academic institutions unpleasant places to work. While administrative staff help support the university's educational and research work, they are often put in a position to enforce policies and regulations. Those experiences

of institutional inflexibility can make their jobs stressful while creating more work for scholars whose processes, partners, or products may not fit within traditional research support systems. A community-based artist interviewed encountered these barriers for herself and others in ongoing projects:

"I think that, for example, I have to fill out four freaking forms to get a stipend for a lecture, a one-time lecture that I do in every city. . . . But the people I work with who, maybe, English is their second language, or maybe, they're undocumented, maybe they're on a fixed income, and they actually cannot take more cash income. . . . If they're unhoused, they don't have an address; they don't have a bank account to do direct deposit into. . . . [P]eople I work with who experience extreme marginalization, their marginalization is based on being cut out of these formal social political, and economic systems, and so this has always been problematic that I run into. . . . [U]niversities don't have a good method for paying homeless or undocumented people."

These trends were described in the sharpest terms by those from a community-based standpoint. All the non-academic interviewees described how difficult it is to receive resources, payments, and support from the academic institutions they collaborate with. Some mentioned how university developments in cities and regions that promise community improvement often result in increased policing and displacement, as quoted above. Yet all the community-based cultural leaders and researchers also hoped to collaborate with and see public impacts produced by academic institutions. Given the disconnect between hopes and experienced realities, feelings of disappointment and disillusionment with higher education were common, such as these reflections from a cultural leader and community-based researcher:

"Those institutions that are rich in resources, that are rich in physical and intellectual resources. That are rich in opportunities. . . . They should be the places in which transformations of our society are emanating from. And they're not. They are the places where dreams and ideas go to die, often. And that's unfortunate, but it's more than unfortunate, it's actually, at some level, it's criminal."

Similarly, from a faculty perspective, one respondent notes,

"Faculty engaged in community projects have relationships not only with their community-based partner but with their students who also encounter these barriers to their own education and work. Many of our students are struggling in our universities, particularly our students of color; as tuition goes up, as they have to deal with debt-financed education, as the pandemic has taken a toll on their doctoral research, as the pandemic has taken a toll on their families, right? So, institutions have not been responding in material ways and in actual meaningful ways, but instead have been doing the symbolic, taking a knee. I also think that one of the challenges here is what the uprisings of 2020 reminded us of, it is that at the very heart of racial subordination in the US are these logics of policing, it's the structure of policing, and that that has to be dismantled and it appears in all institutions in different ways."

Despite the repeated critiques, in the transcripts we observed a commitment from researchers, artists, and scholars – inside and outside institutional walls – to make visible and to disrupt these structures and their effects on the production, dissemination, and impact of knowledge in the world. These participants use the tools of organizing relationships across community-university lines to lift stories that have been made invisible through explicit and more subtle forms of dismissal. Beyond the diagnostic of the problems, the collection of stories told in the interviews revealed a strong impetus for continued engagement in public and activist research and strategic approaches to changing the ways academic institutions interface with this work. The following sections demonstrate how the work of public, engaged, and activist scholars and artists are already forging pathways to transformation.

We heard in our interviews that public scholars are finding ways to survive and thrive.

Public scholars are making sense of their institutional homes in the academy and are finding ways to address the challenges of academic life through their research and collaborative work with others. We found a commonly shared expression of how change happens in the corners, in the interdisciplinary institutes, in the nooks and crannies, in the ‘undercommons,’ out in communities, and through a shared understanding that change does not often happen via the institutional center or writ large. We also frequently heard that doing work that considers the ‘whole self,’ from one’s ancestral roots to current community practices that center public scholar commitments outside of the institution can counter feelings of isolation and frustration in inhospitable departments and universities. Every interviewee discussed the importance of building relationships with others who share values, commitments, identities, and cultures inside and outside the academy. Another common approach was to organize, speak, and write with community, movements, kinfolk, friends, allies, partners, and collaborators outside of the academy to expand understanding of what research can look like, what matters and what is possible.

One of our community-based artist interviewees expressed how the university could be a space of radical possibility:

“I think universities are the space for dreamers, right? They are the space for these outlandish thinkers, these audacity-filled folks who want to understand more about the world. So, when we have those people, I think that there is an opportunity for the infrastructure and the culture of these universities . . . to take a shift.”

One of our public scholar respondents who is embedded in radical feminist traditions explains a similar sentiment,

“I think that the main things we need to address have to be the shifts, the geopolitical, economic, and cultural shifts that have happened in higher education over the last thirty, forty years. And in a way, we’re at a good moment because I think those shifts are much more visible now. . . . it’s a very neat time to be teaching my Intro Women’s Studies students. Because for me, pedagogy and teaching are always a hopeful

practice. It's very frustrating, it's very challenging, but it's hopeful. [The university] is one of the few places that we can actually inspire people to go against the grain."

Similarly, another public scholar explains,

"My work and my intention and what grounds me has certainly been to expand our understanding and definitions of knowledge and whose knowledges count. It's been important for me to, in the work that I do to be committed to and to do work and service to and with community. And so, I haven't been guided by. . . or inspired. . . by what we think of as some of the more traditional scholarly products or literacies. It certainly comes from ancestral, and ritual, and community-led and created knowledges. . . It is deeply familial for me, so the challenge has always been working within institutional spaces like the university, how to stay true to who I am, where I come from, whose shoulders and whose work has guided me and taught me and led me."

Somewhat differently, many of the administrator interviewees and the most senior scholars discussed the importance of building the capacity of peers to step into positions of power and to help others navigate up and down the institutional structure. This work requires a keen understanding of power within the institution and making transparent how the institution works. There was also a shared recognition that an incremental approach to change is necessary in the context of the transient nature of university leadership, juxtaposed with the slow pace of institutional change. Several administrator interviewees shared that in this context, lasting change is very difficult to achieve if the reliance is placed only in role-defined leaders and not in a more distributed network of power and collective organizing.

Several respondents with experience in various levels of leadership spoke to the unrealized or unrecognized power that individual and collective faculty have to create change:

"When you don't realize the kind of power that you have, then you're not able to effect any kind of change and realize even the leverage that you could have in a larger institutional setting. And I knew this just simply from the ways deans operated, they are willing to let other people be the risk takers, but they'll come in and take credit pretty quickly if it works. And so, for me I often think there's metaphor in a lot of the issues of power that we talk about and not a lot of action. And senior faculty just really surprised me because they didn't even realize they could do certain things at very low risk to them."

A former campus president leader similarly ponders,

"What is it that animates the men and women of an institution that brings them into activity, into behavior, into engagement given the structures of value they currently obtain, they reinforce and undergird systems of institutional power and institutional relationship? . . . You can act as if there were a way of changing culture. . . rooted in your own system of values and organize."

One campus leader described her transition from being an ethnic studies public scholar to becoming a campus president and the rewarding experience of collectively organizing change,

“And so, coming into that work, I started working with a group of other faculty members who had deep experiences in community engagement, civic engagement, grassroots organizing. And these were the same faculty colleagues who brought their experience with organizing the institution informally through a grassroots perspective and.. [thinking] about the institution from a formal standpoint. . . [They said] ‘Let’s make sure you get tenure because once you get tenure, you can then make a decision if you’re gonna take faculty leadership in formal structures like the academic senate or even if you’re interested in doing faculty organizing with the union.’ So, when a new president came, who specifically called out that this was a primary agenda item, it was a dream come true for a faculty member that wanted to build and do. I was hard-pressed to leave the faculty ranks, but in terms of being more effective in the institution, I felt like it was a direction that I should be open to, so that I could participate in institutional change and transformation.”

Beyond spaces of care, connection, capacity building, and collective organizing, we also learned how the work itself transforms the academy toward a place that values a wider range of research, wisdom, and knowledge.

The scholar, artist, and community-based interviewees were certain that public scholarship projects have changed institutional cultures by modeling a long-haul commitment to work that is explicitly striving toward social, environmental, political, racial, or economic justice. Projects that demonstrate regional impact on urgent issues provide inspiration to graduate students and junior colleagues in terms of what is imagined as possible. They also tend to engage powerful outside stakeholders who can hold the university accountable to stated commitments. Engagement with real-time pressing issues also offer younger scholars with a range of possible research outlets and career opportunities beyond those populated and promoted by the disciplinary gatekeepers.

One mode of challenging existing structures mentioned by most interviewees was in the establishment and resourcing of centers, institutes, and smaller spaces carved out in larger institutions, as critical to seeding, supporting, lifting, and leveraging public scholarship. Centers were identified as spaces that allow this kind of work to flourish outside the confines of disciplinary and institutional boundaries. This scholar articulates how institutional change stems from what research centers and institutes can learn when in authentic relationship with communities and movements:

“So, this is a lot of the work we do at the institute [name]. We do social scientific research and humanistic research. We do it with a very clear idea of challenging structures of displacement and dispossession. Now, that clarity around what sort of research we should do doesn't come from us; it doesn't come from within the university. It comes to us from communities who are experiencing displacement and

dispossession, it comes from the movements that are organizing on the frontlines. And so, I like to say that in many ways, the research we undertake is homework given to us by those who are directly experiencing these forms of inequality and oppression, but we take that homework very seriously, and we recognize that we can do certain things that other institutions can't do. So, to me, this idea of a research and scholarship that is in deep partnership with movements and communities, but we're very clear about our role as researchers and scholars, and where we are constantly challenging our own disciplines of knowledge formations is how I think about institutional change."

Interviewees also described their work as creating institutional change by encouraging research partnerships and learning spaces that treat all people as equally smart and equipped to produce meaningful scholarship across community-university lines. Relatedly, the interviewees engaged in creative cultural work emphasized research products that center and appropriately credit culture bearers and participants of all ages and backgrounds as demonstrating what is possible in academic recognition and reward systems. One researcher recounted how the collaborators in her projects with youth or with incarcerated adults were instrumental in reframing the questions and who can be considered an expert,

"But women in prison are constantly reshaping our language around prisoners and inmates and survivors of the criminal punishment system. So, language, which is always a way of reframing [asks], 'What's the question you think you're studying?' . . . So, educating their own communities, becoming defendants in lawsuits, but also presenting at academic conferences. It's not nothing . . . because for most of the groups we're working with, the academy and schooling has not been a welcoming or respectful place, so then presenting back to those audiences as scholars, it is powerful."

A community-based culture keeper and organizer interviewed similarly confronts the question of who is valued and treated as a worthy producer of knowledge,

"We have so many students who I deal with on a regular basis. For every student I have had like 'Susie,' who is at Stanford, I have a ton of [neighborhood kids] who were just like, 'school is not my thing. I wanna be a drummer.' . . . How many of those folks are we trying to marry with these systems of 'higher worth'? And it's not what [they feel worthy of]. So, I challenge their thinking all the time. We have some superior, superior elders in this community who have never set foot on anybody's campus but are worthy of those accolades of the president of any university."

Another major category of institution change led by public scholars involves innovations in research theory, methodology, and practices. Research that is collaborative and equally beneficial to all involved was frequently mentioned as having a ripple effect outwards to expand departmental and even disciplinary norms. Many shared examples of artmaking, research, and scholarship that is collective versus individualistic, expanding impact by sustaining long-term partnerships. In these cases, engaged research partnerships often confront the norms of scope and scale, acceptable research timelines, products, and

outcomes. The qualitative research methodology, mixed methods, and interdisciplinary approaches were seen to play a critical role in building trusting relationships, intervening in complex problems, and building new partnerships across departments, units, and off-campus communities. Research practices that are intentionally reflective and iterative were described as resulting in the ongoing dissemination of intellectual and artistic products.

Many reflected on how this relational approach involves emotional work and deep affection. An ethnic studies movement scholar reflected,

"We say it all the time internally, that we lead with love, and we talk about love in our work. Love is not 'I feel very emotional.' Love is not a word we use in the academy; you're not supposed to love people, to express any kind of commitment to people that is rooted in just love and affection is not a word we can use. . . . But we love our community; we love each other; we want to be a space where people can come and be seen and feel whole. And to think that even love can be so radical, and it's not just transformative but also threatening. . . . Those of us who do this community-engaged work. It so comes from just the traumas of our community. We come here because we love our families; we love these communities that have formed us. We want to give back."

Another scholar recognizes the importance of partnership and love through a different lens:

"So, I think a powerful first is to demonstrate the excellence of that scholarship, and I emphasize excellence because academia defines excellence in many different ways. And for those of us who really believe in this kind of public scholarship, I think it's crucial for us to demonstrate that this scholarship not only meets all of those criteria of academic excellence but exceeds them. So, in all of these projects that I do and that we do with the institute, we do the peer review publishing, we make sure that our grants are from the National Science Foundation, that they've been through this rigorous competition that is the hallmark of academic excellence, of conventional notions of academic excellence and then we do more. And that more is a whole set of things. One piece of it are these deep partnerships I was talking about, and as you all know, those partnerships don't just appear; they are built over years. There's an investment of love and trust and time there that academia has no way of recognizing or celebrating. So that's what I mean; it's like academic excellence but more."

Several scholars focused on sharing how this work requires strategies to stay true to one's one community, culture, and commitments as a public scholar while staying firmly based in an academic institution,

"It's become a kind of centerpiece of my teaching, of my research, of my intervention work to enlist partners who are differently positioned and are the ones you want to sustain the work going forward. To be kind of collaborators and co-creators rather than recipients of my expertise. . . . As a white woman who works and cares deeply about

issues of race, it's become even more clear to me. . . that I cannot effectively help an institution transform itself . . . without active collaboration with people of different races and positions being co-creators of the intellectual work."

The role of storytelling and creative narratives in building collaborative research and creating public impact was such a common theme that it populated every corner of our data coding diagrams.

There is probably no other strategic focus that appeared more frequently across the interviews as a means of transforming institutions and their relations to students, faculty, staff, and broader communities. Some respondents were particularly invested in telling meaningful stories to multiple audiences in language that is not exclusionary. For example, as a public scholar shares here,

"Patricia Hill Collins says, 'I could not write a book that a Black woman could not read.' That line has stayed with me my whole career. . . . I have to do a lot of work to tie [complex] concepts together and make them very legible to people, and I do that by speaking and working in ways that, as we say in the Black church, 'make it plain.' So that has been my own disposition toward my work and how I want to do it. Now, there are people who do not like that; there are people who review you for promotions and for tenure and other kinds of accolades and reward professionally that have never really been into it. . . . And I don't think I'm the first Black woman who works on issues of race, class, and gender to be institutionally punished for doing that kind of work, but I do feel the effects of those who don't appreciate the translation work that I do to the public, who see that as not scholarly, and who don't understand that the knowledge project is about making knowledge available to people who are not inside the institution."

Others advocated for storytelling as a means of opening the walls of institutions and the minds of others to varied forms of knowledge:

"Part of that storytelling could be something about empathy because education is a mechanism for empathy because there really is a way to hear other people's stories and try to understand other people's stories can promote empathy. Creating change requires empathy and relationships."

"So why don't we invite people to share their intentions? Why don't we invite people to gather differently? Why don't we pair up the people that know most about the stuff that's happening with the folks that have the credential knowledge, that is technical and has been acknowledged, and open up imagination?"

Several community artists and culture bearers interviewed described imagination and creativity more broadly as essential in pushing toward culture and social change inside and outside of academia:

"The first classes that I taught. . . with artists that were deeply interested in engaging social practice in communities as a way of not only dealing with the aesthetic, but also having the work be purpose-driven beyond beauty, beyond calm and respite, but also offering something that was dynamic in play. How Black artists changed everything. . . Because of our historical circumstance, we've understood something that is quite unique about the country that we've always been engaged as citizens, as artists."

"When Black celebrities worked in the Civil Rights Movement, these are human beings who recognized that they are in a position of [cultural] power, and instead of hoarding that power and using it only for their personal benefit, they're risking their power to make sure that communities are uplifted. And that's the way I see artists working every day, and often the academy is working to their detriment. . . and making it really difficult for individuals to really use their voice for good without consequence."

Finally, we also heard that to confront the enduring institutional problems, people articulated that approaches that involve interruption of business as usual are critical in these times.

While a small number of interviewees reiterated the importance of changing tenure handbooks and codifying the methods and best practices of public scholarship, the most common interruptions or demands discussed are as follows. Participants want institutions with power and resources to pay people for their work, expertise, and time (especially non-academic researchers and community partners who are often overlooked and unpaid). Many suggested that intentional efforts must be conducted to contain the more rigid disciplinary gatekeepers who are marginalizing others and maintaining the status quo from centers of power, and to remove those who have seriously abused their power by creating toxic environments. Several interviewees demanded that universities address student debt, rising tuition, the inequality of adjunct pay, and other challenges produced by the political economy of higher education. Others suggested that we hold universities accountable to community-based knowledge and culture keepers by inviting them to receive fellowships, awards, degrees, and other forms of recognition. In the end, our interviewees share a commitment to bringing resources out of institutions and into communities to support impactful social actors and movements outside of the individual reward systems and incentives of the academy. In the words of one community-based artist and researcher,

"In order for institutions to really transform themselves so that they pay attention to all forms of knowledge . . . So, they (must) decolonize a lot of the material practices that they engage in, there must be a redistribution of resources that happens at all levels there has to be a serious understanding of how the political economy of the university works so that labor is seen as labor and people . . . And I think that we need to create

more pedagogies that cross boundaries of all kinds and are about collaborations; we need to stop pretending that it's all about the individual."

From two academic researchers we also heard about the importance of listening to, supporting, and resourcing students who are organizing change:

"Your faculty is going to be able to tell you what's possible now, but your students are going to be able to set the long-term goals. Sometimes all we can see is the restriction. And I think students are much better at offering. . . the most compelling vision for the future."

"And I see this with my students; I see how many. . . particularly say my master's students, but even my doctoral students, students of color, and most of my doctoral students are women of color, I see how they take on the stars, this additional burden of making institutional change. And on the one hand, I love them for it, I join them in it, and on the other hand as their advisor, I want to say, 'Screw that. Write a dissertation, publish your articles, get the best job you can.' And its unpaid work; this unpaid, unrecognized work should not be your burden. And that worries me a lot because I also see the burnout, and I see the burnout among my faculty colleagues, and I clearly see it among my doctoral students, so the very people who are being asked to constantly do this work of transformation are already the ones who are doing more than they should be, and they are literally being sacrificed often."

In addition to listening and responding to the material needs of faculty, staff, and students, respondents pushed for a future orientation that is imaginative and proactive, not tied solely to the imperatives, timelines, and accustomed languages of the university. From a university-based artist,

"What are some of the things to consider doing? An organization that has rarely had, for instance, African American women doing anything serious for them in any sustained way. . . maybe they could consider developing a three to five-year residency program with five to eight serious women artists and really support them over a period of time to develop bodies of work. . . . So, you make the investment now. You don't wait until there's another upheaval to respond to, but you decide that investing in difference and inclusion now really matters. . . . Audiences will be changing for universities, for every single cultural institution in this country right now. And so, if you are interested in having a dialogue with that community and broadening your base, then you have to begin to put things in place that are going to make that difference. . . . [And find] people who didn't come up with these ideas yesterday but have been really working through these ideas over the course of serious practice."

Embedded in these demands is a recognition that there are already people who share a vision for a more open, creative, caring academy and are collectively organizing change.

A community-based artist and researcher offered guidance for other community-based researchers in academia:

"I think the best thing they can do is organize. You can rest assured that if you're dealing with the channels within the institution, you're not the first one to deal with it, you're not the first one to think about organizing around it, and usually, if you look around and ask the right questions, you can find the group of people who are already pushing. And you push with them because there's power in numbers, there's power in collective organizing."

The Way Forward

This report provides a broad overview of the research goals, methods, context, and preliminary findings from the Imagining America Leading and Learning Initiative research project. It is a starting point and not the summation of our inquiry. The emergent themes described in this report will be shared with various advisors, stakeholders, and community members at the 2022 IA National Gathering, in addition to the findings from the two associated graduate scholar projects, and twenty multi-media Stories of Change case studies. As found through our exploratory research, while institutions of higher education are not yet set up to fully support this critical work, there is a diverse network of impactful public, engaged, and activist artists and scholars expanding research and creative practice on and off university campuses across the country. It was our honor to spend the past few years learning from some of the most inspired change agents leading the way.

There is additional analysis and writing ahead, and we have not surfaced here all the issues present in this expansive project. In addition to future writing to deepen the analysis presented here, we will be connecting the research to other critical questions such as the role of funding, diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts, and other institutional features that can either support or sideline public scholars.

Most importantly for Imagining America and those who care about changing campus culture to support public scholarship, we are currently designing media, advocacy, and dialogue tools for others engaged in campus change efforts small or large. Over the past year, we worked with communications firm the Fahrenheit Group to develop two sets of messages derived from this phase of the research: one for audiences who have yet to discover the potential power of public scholarship and creative practice; and one for those who are already engaged in the work of changing institutional practices. The draft messages are included in the appendices of this report. The revised messages will ultimately inform new communications, guidelines, advocacy, peer support, and dialogue activities for public scholars, allies, and advocates in the months and likely years to come. For starters, we are currently designing and testing a demonstration version of an IA Public Scholars Creating Change Conversational Card Deck. As always, Imagining America welcomes your feedback, ideas, and questions. We look forward to sharing this work at the 2022 IA National Gathering and engaging with many of you in person in New Orleans!

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Appendix A. Interview Protocols

Imagining America's Leading and Learning Initiative Protocol

Pilot Interviews with Campus Administrators, Interview Questions

1. Based on your own experiences, can you start by sharing with me what 'culture shift' means to you, in the context of challenging institutional behaviors and ways of thinking that limit, marginalize, or fail to support public scholars and collaborators?
2. Can you share a vivid memory or clear example from your institution or field that demonstrates specific traits of institutional culture that marginalize public scholarship - in the arts, design, and humanities in particular?
3. What does institutional culture change look or feel like? Can you share a specific experience or example either small or large?
4. Can you now talk about your own approach, or that of someone you know who you think is a change agent or catalyst of institutional culture change? Describe that work, what does it look like in specific institutional contexts?
5. What have you observed as key ingredients, frames, strategies and approaches to brokering change and shifting entrenched institutional cultures?
6. What aspects of institutional life seem to be the most stubbornly resistant to change, and why?

Artist / Engaged / Activist Scholar Interview Questions

1. Can you start by sharing how your own engaged or/movement-aligned scholarship (or creative practice) expands our understanding of knowledge production?
 - a. What have you observed as mechanisms of expansion advanced by other knowledge producers -- who may be traditionally under-acknowledged by higher education -- whether due to their activist, community-based, feminist, BIPOC, queer, anti-racist, and/or anti-colonial approaches?
2. Can you now describe how one or two of your projects have influenced the ways ideas travel from academic research into the public sphere and social change agendas?

- a. In the context of your own work, what are the most powerful ideas and methodologies for organizing change?
3. How are the activist, engaged and traditionally marginalized knowledge producers you have worked with, in your own institution or beyond, building relationships and power to challenge patterns of inequality and exclusion within and across university-community lines?
4. How do we center public and activist faculty, students, and community-based researchers/artists in the university-change agenda?
 - a. What strategies have worked to lift and support these scholars?
 - b. What are the most critical interventions we must take today?
 - c. What are the most hardened obstacles?
5. Where are you seeing public and activist scholars or artists playing a critical role in addressing the challenges presented by the global pandemic along with the ongoing struggles for social, racial, environmental, and economic justice?
 - a. What do you think is most needed to build upon this critical work?
6. How might the creative methodologies and forms of knowledge production in the arts, design, and humanities make higher education more responsive to public needs while also strengthening opportunities and learning opportunities for scholars, teachers, and students?

I Institutional Administrative Leaders / Brokers Interview Questions

1. How would you describe your own approach to leading institutional change?
2. What have been the most effective strategies to organize, broker, and leverage change on behalf of public, engaged and activist scholars?
3. Can you share an example of a successful change effort and walk me through what it took for the various collaborators to get there?
4. What do you think that institutional change efforts should prioritize within the context of the global pandemic and the ongoing struggles for racial, environmental, social, and economic justice?

5. If you were to write a book about organizing institutional change in higher education to better support public, engaged, and activist scholars, what would the book title be and what would be included in the table of contents?
6. What advice would you give to new campus leaders setting out on a long-haul journey to change institutions of higher education to better support scholars, students, and staff committed to engaged scholarship on the most pressing issues of our time?
7. How might the creative methodologies and forms of knowledge production in the arts, design, and humanities make higher education more responsive to public needs while also strengthening opportunities and learning for scholars, teachers, and students?

I Outside Higher Education Cultural Leader / Scholar Artist Interview Questions

1. Can you start by sharing how your own writing, creative work, or research radically expands our understanding of the ways in which knowledge is produced?
 - a. What are the most pressing issues that your work aims to address?
 - b. How would you describe your approach to the work?
2. How has your creative and/or scholarly work made ideas travel into the public sphere to influence local, regional or national social change agendas?
3. In the context of this work, what have been the most powerful ideas, practices and methodologies for bringing your work to inspire change or bring social awareness to important issues such as racial, social or economic justice?
4. Where are you seeing public and activist scholars and artists playing a critical role to address the challenges presented by the global pandemic and the ongoing struggles for social, racial, environmental, and economic justice?
 - a. What do you think they most need to build upon this critical work?
5. How are the community-based artists and knowledge producers in your own organization or networks challenging patterns of inequality and exclusion across university-community lines?
6. If you were to commit to an organizing agenda to hold higher education accountable to community-based forms of knowledge making, where would you start?
 - a. What are the top 5 things that need to change?
 - b. What would you need to be effective in organizing change?

7. Who do you see as institutional allies in higher education? Who most needs to change?
8. What in your estimation are the most daunting or entrenched problems that will take long haul change efforts?
9. How do you propose that we center, resource, and lift community-based researchers/artists in the university-change agenda?
 - a. What strategies have worked to lift and support these scholars and artists?
10. What are the most critical interventions we must take today?
11. Final Question (IF NOT ALREADY ADDRESSED IN THE INTERVIEW): How might the creative methodologies and forms of knowledge production in the arts, design, and humanities make higher education more responsive to public needs while also strengthening opportunities and learning for scholars, teachers, and students?

Appendix B. Communications Messages

Imagining America: Artists and Scholars in Public Life Critical Intersections: Public Scholars Creating Culture, Catalyzing Change

Introductory Messaging (Developed in partnership with the Fahrenheit Group)

Value of Public Scholarship

Universities must prioritize research that engages reciprocal community partnership because real-world problems require imaginative, long-term, and multifaceted solutions grounded within communities.

The creative and narrative methods of public scholarship in the arts, design, and humanities are essential for bringing people together and inspiring new ways of seeing and organizing change.

Learning the collaborative methodologies of public scholarship equips the next generation of scholars to work with communities most impacted by the racial, social, and climate justice issues we face today.

Supporting scholarship led by those most impacted by the pressing issues of our time enables colleges and universities to realize their commitments to serve the public good.

Systems Change

Community-based methodologies resist and reverse the trauma caused by legacies of injustice rooted in extractive practices enacted by the academy.

Public scholars have created circles of care, recognition, peer support and collective learning among the most marginalized centers of knowledge production in higher education.

Community-engaged scholarship inspires researchers to expand traditional disciplinary boundaries to create more just and inclusive research, teaching, and learning spaces.

| Call-to-Action

We call on academic institutions to support public scholarship and to recognize diverse forms of knowledge-making to deliver on stated commitments to access, inclusion, and racial justice.

We call on academic institutions to respect and recognize community-based wisdom for its valuable contributions to knowledge production by allocating resources to non-academic collaborators and communities.

We call on academic institutions to reduce or discontinue bureaucratic processes and hurdles that prevent fair recognition and compensation for all individual and community contributors to collaborative research.

We call on academic institutions to better resource the vibrant institutional centers led by public and activist scholars to ensure more students, faculty, and administrators can benefit from transformational approaches to research and learning.

| Imagining America: Artists and Scholars in Public Life Critical Intersections: Public Scholars Creating Culture, Catalyzing Change

| Direct Messaging (Developed in partnership with the Fahrenheit Group)

| Value of Public Scholarship

Universities must prioritize research that engages reciprocal community partnership because real-world problems require imaginative, long-term, and multifaceted solutions grounded within communities.

Public scholars have historically and consistently conducted research that matters—work that is explicitly focused on social, political, racial, and ecological justice.

Public scholarship has employed writing and artmaking as hopeful practices to engage people in genuine dialogue about difficult issues and generate solutions to collective problems.

Exclusionary notions of knowledge production continue to limit efforts to address diversity, equity, and inclusion—especially when institutions ignore the wisdom of campus and community-based artists, activists, and storytellers who have direct experience with and knowledge of the issues researchers seek to address.

The racial, social, and ecological justice struggles of our time require that we foreground engaged research methodologies that produce collective solutions and commitments instead of frameworks that rely on competitive, extractive, individualized, and siloed theories and methods.

I Forging Connections and Relationships

Public scholarship networks offer academic institutions a model for investing in practices that recognize the whole self, including an ethos of community care and healing.

To encourage public scholarship, academic institutions must support spaces on and off campus where scholars, community partners, movement makers, and friends can connect, share, imagine, and co-create.

To live up to academic missions to serve the public good, university faculty, staff, and leaders must recognize and respect the lived wisdom and experiences of community-based knowers and culture bearers who contribute to the well-being of the campus region.

Public and engaged scholars often lead the way in demonstrating the values universities espouse by building relationships with others who share commitments to creating more just and caring cultures inside and outside of the academy.

I Recompense: time, labor, and resource struggles

For too long, universities have maintained narrow and outmoded disciplinary norms and boundaries that reward the few at the expense of the many. Universities must pay people for their work, expertise, and time, especially non-academic researchers and community partners who are systematically overlooked and under-compensated.

Faculty, staff, students and allies must collectively hold universities accountable to community-based researchers and culture keepers by bringing resources into the community.

Individual peers and allies in the academy should help public scholars navigate the challenges presented by disciplinary gatekeepers who marginalize engaged scholarship.

Peers and allies must also make the distribution of power in the institution transparent to help public scholars navigate the system.

Universities have not allocated resources in a way that encourages public scholarship or enhances the public good. More commonly, the university has engaged in partnerships that reinforce elitist and monetized forms of knowledge production that lead to gentrification, aggressive policing, and extractive research practices.

I Change from the Corners, Centers, and Community

Public scholars have found ways to survive and succeed by catalyzing change from the corners, in the 'undercommons,' and within communities to counter the institutional paralysis that plagues the academy.

Universities should better resource the vibrant institutional corners and centers led by public and activist scholars to ensure more students, faculty, and administrators can benefit from transformational approaches to research and learning.

These "corners" enable public and activist scholars to build relationships with peers, community members, and allies who share values, commitments, identities, and cultures inside and outside the academy. When resourced, those relationships can amplify collective solutions to public problems.