

***Place-Based Community Engagement in Higher Education: A strategy to Transform Universities and Communities.* Erica K. Yamamura and Kent Koth. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing. (2018). 161 pages. ISBN 978-1620366776 (paper) \$35, ISBN: 978-1620366769 (hardcover) \$125.**

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As the title and subtitle suggest, Yamamura and Koth's *Place-Based Community Engagement in Higher Education* invites community engagement practitioners to participate in the critical and challenging work of institutional and community transformation. Yamamura and Koth argue that community engagement efforts in higher education have the most impact when focused on a specific geographic location. The book does not serve as a how-to guide for practitioners. Rather, these authors offer the strategy of place-based community engagement as a starting point for practitioners whose individual efforts will and should be context-specific. Focusing university community engagement efforts in a specific location, the authors reason, "could lead to transformation of individual institutions and communities and also foster renewal and innovation in the field of higher education as a whole" (p. xii).

While several recent books (Berkey, Meixner, Green, & Eddins Rountree, 2018; Dostilio, 2017; Welch, 2016) explore various aspects of community engagement in higher education (e.g. community engagement professionals, best practices for centers of community engagement, and examples of impactful service-learning strategies), Yamamura and Koth's emphasis on place and their use of a "collective case study approach" set their work apart from recent volumes (p. 29). Yamamura and Koth claim that centering all community engagement efforts in one location "invites universities to put an equal emphasis on campus *and* community impact" (p. 20). This claim is based on the authors' extensive fieldwork. Yamamura and Koth collected data from five centers for community engagement at five universities (Drexel University, Loyola University Maryland, San Diego State University, Seattle University, and the University of San Diego). They analyzed documents gathered from each university's community engagement office prior to their site visits, during which they interviewed "university faculty, staff, and students; school counselors, principals, and teachers; community residents; funders; and a city councilperson" (p. 31). With its unique emphasis on place and extensively researched claims, this book offers readers an innovative strategy for community engagement that has been tried and tested by successful practitioners. In the following review, I will explore this unique community engagement strategy practiced by several universities and described by Yamamura and Koth.

Yamamura and Koth organize their work in three parts; each part consists of three chapters. Part one includes an introduction chapter, a chapter defining place-based community engagement, and a methodology chapter. In the introductory chapter, the authors skillfully and succinctly review contextual literature exploring current trends in community engagement as well as existing challenges to community engaged efforts in higher education. In many ways, this introductory chapter acts as a "state of the field" for readers interested in service-learning and community engagement. One central concern for Yamamura and Koth is the tendency of "contemporary community engagement efforts in higher education [to] focus more on student learning and faculty research [than] pursuing measurable change on larger social issues" (p. 3). This concern for equity in partnerships is shared by other scholars in the field (Butin, 2006; Mitchell, 2008), and Yamamura and Koth argue that place-based community engagement can work to reverse this narrative. In Chapter 2, Yamamura and Koth share and explore their definition of place-based community engagement as "a long-term university-wide commitment to partner with local residents, organizations, and other leaders to focus equally on campus and community impact within a clearly defined geographic area" (p. 18). They explain that place-based community engagement happens in three phases: the process moves from exploration to development and finally into a sustaining phase. In Chapter 3, Yamamura and Koth describe their methods of data collection. As mentioned above, this research relies on documents from and conversations with community engagement practitioners involved in place-based strategies at five universities. This methodology chapter

might serve as a useful guide to readers who are also interested in understanding and evaluating community engagement efforts in higher education.

In part two, Yamamura and Koth present the findings of their research; the informative results of their fieldwork are described through the three phases of place-based community engagement strategies. Thus, Chapter 4 focuses on the exploration phase. Here, the reader learns about the complexities of beginning a place-based strategy. According to Yamamura and Koth, one key aspect of exploration is spending time listening to community partners. Several of the universities included in this study spent years holding listening sessions and community meetings before reaching mutual decisions with community partners about place-based programs. After exploration, place-based initiatives move into the development phase which is the focus of Chapter 5. This phase of a place-based initiative is a period marked by swift change and adjustment. University partnerships, curriculum, and programs must be realigned with the place-based strategy. I found this chapter to be especially helpful because the authors mention specific partnerships and programs at each university; this gives the reader an idea of what might be possible with a place-based initiative. As a new place-based strategy develops, it can finally move into the sustaining phase which is covered in Chapter 6. Here, Yamamura and Koth discuss important considerations for ensuring the long-term success of a place-based strategy including avoiding gentrification and working toward attaining a “virtuous cycle” (p. 91). Place-based initiatives have the possibility of creating and/or increasing gentrification which is the “influx of thousands of middle- and upper-income people into neighborhoods that have historically been inhabited by low-income residents” (p. 85). Thus, community engagement practitioners must work hard to recognize the signs of gentrification so that they do not contribute to this unjust change in their neighborhoods. Another, more positive sign of the sustaining phase is what the authors refer to as the “virtuous cycle” which they define as “long-term programs that serve community members who then enroll at the university and give back to their own communities” (p. 91). The long-term, place-based process outlined in Part Two will be especially helpful to community engagement practitioners who are interested in pursuing this kind of strategy.

Finally, part three contains important takeaways for university faculty, students, staff, and administrators who might be interested in beginning a place-based community engagement strategy. Part three begins with Chapter 7, entitled “A View from the Community;” this chapter focuses solely on community responses to and perspectives on university partnerships. By highlighting the voices of community members in this chapter, Yamamura and Koth enact a clear response to their early critique of contemporary community engagement efforts as being overly-focused on university student and faculty outcomes. These authors claim, “when leaders from the campus and the community partner together as equals they can achieve significant impact on campus and in the community” (p. 114). After hearing from community members, Yamamura and Koth go on to discuss assessment of results of place-based initiatives in Chapter 8. The information covered in this chapter would be useful to any community engagement practitioner who is interested in assessing university community engagement efforts. In the final chapter, Yamamura and Koth offer some overall lessons from their research and some takeaways for those interested in creating place-based initiatives. Ultimately, these authors argue that in implementing a place-based strategy “boundaries between campus and community become blurred and new possibilities emerge. Amid this process, our society can find new innovations and a chance to more fully live out our beliefs in a more just and compassionate world” (p. 140).

Any reader interested in service-learning and community engagement in higher education will likely find *Place-Based Community Engagement in Higher Education* to be a worthwhile read. However, this book seems to be more targeted to community engagement administrators who might be looking for a new strategy to implement in their own institutions. Much of the work focuses on the importance of finding and sustaining internal and external funding for place-based strategies. There are also many pages spent discussing how place-based initiatives impact university organizational structures. And, this is my only critique of the book; I am left wishing for more focus on the specific community partnerships and programs used by each university included in this study. I think more specific information about service-learning courses and community partnerships would be helpful to faculty and students who might want to advocate for place-based strategies at their own universities.

After reading this book, it is clear that place-based initiatives are desirable community engagement endeavors because they work toward equity of campus and community outcomes and because they can bring university community engagement missions to life. I highly recommend this work to those interested in equitable community engagement strategies.

References

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