

Introduction

This document was shaped through deliberative dialogue between board members and the general membership spanning forums at the 2013 conference, 2014 board meetings, and 2014 town hall meetings. It makes public our very best thinking *at this moment in time* and affirms the Association's mission, focus, guiding principles, and the implications they hold for the Association's practices.

The Association should continue to discuss matters the membership finds critical to the guiding principles and practice of the Association. We recommend that the board of directors attend to these conversations regularly so that this reaffirmation statement may fulfill its spirit as a living document that reflects the best thinking of the Association in any given moment of time. In working toward continual refinement of this statement, it is our belief that our Association, and knowledge about service-learning and community engagement, will be strengthened.

At this time, February 2014, matters for continued discussion include:

- How the purposes of research promoted by the Association are characterized and positioned. A segment of our membership feels that social justice and democratic participation should be foregrounded as the purposes of research promoted by the Association.
- A broader framing of the work the Association promotes. A segment of our membership is uncomfortable with the terminology of research as prioritized over other terms such as knowledge production. Further, there are questions about how work that represents enduring best practices of engagement *that is clearly connected to research and theory* (either to its development or revision) may be recognized for its formative potential and welcomed in the Association.

The following reaffirmation statement is a board-adopted public document that guides the conduct of the Association and the work welcomed into its annual research conference and publications in the future.

IARSLCE Reaffirmation Statement 2014

Mission and Purpose

The mission of the Association is: "To promote the development and dissemination of research on service-learning and community engagement internationally and across all levels of the education system." The Association is the only international organization whose primary purpose is to cultivate, encourage, and present this research across all engagement forms and educational levels; and it fulfills its mission by embracing all research frameworks (e.g., positivist, interpretive, participatory, critical, etc.), methods (e.g., qualitative, quantitative, mixed, etc.), and approaches (e.g., basic, applied, action, engaged, evaluation, etc.). The Association promotes high quality research across a wide

range of approaches and forms and builds the capacity of scholars to engage in such research.

Given the breadth of disciplines that contribute to the research on service-learning and community engagement, the Association welcomes and embraces all paradigms of research and rigorous theoretical inquiry. Indeed, IARSLCE should be THE Association within which participants analyze and discuss topics such as the strengths and limitations of different paradigms, methods, and types of research along with the purposes of service-learning and community engagement. The Association embraces quantitative and qualitative social science research on service-learning and community engagement and the associated research methodologies as well as emphasizes the study of service-learning and community engagement through research and inquiry that includes bibliographic studies (review articles, literature reviews, etc.), historical and biographical studies, and content analysis. IARSLCE encourages the development of theoretical contributions and refinements (discussion of theory, development of new theoretical models, synthesis of theories, etc.) pertaining to service-learning and community engagement as a critical endeavor.

Throughout the history of the the Association, the emphasis has arguably been on experimental research as the standard. Going forward, the Association will continue to advance more and better experimental (causal) research, especially as the field grows across international contexts. In addition, given the Association's focus on service-learning and community engagement as topics of research, it is important to include methodologies that emerge from service-learning and community engagement. Thus, the Association will also emphasize research conducted through community-engaged approaches (e.g., participatory research). The Association will promote and advance collaborative research methods used to study service-learning and community engagement as well as studies that help to better understand the dynamics and outcomes of collaboration through partnerships between community and educational entities (across the educational spectrum). Such an emphasis is an important part of the Association's work, and more research that is grounded in emerging paradigms will be shared and discussed at the conference, published in the journal, and otherwise examined and disseminated through the full range of the Association's venues.

Guiding Principles

As a membership association uniquely positioned to advance research on service-learning and community engagement, the Association can be the premier organization for setting the standards, expectations, and directions for such research around the world. To achieve this, several guiding principles will be used to direct the work of the organization:

- IARSLCE embraces all research perspectives, supports all methods, and values all forms of research while also setting a high bar for critical analysis, debate, and rigor. All work conducted and disseminated within the purview of the Association will be vetted through systematic peer review processes.
- IARSLCE encourages the advancement of research related to all forms of and

approaches to community engagement (service-learning, political engagement, field based internships, community-based research, community-engaged research, etc.) and across all educational sectors (primary, secondary, and higher education, as well as informal educational settings).

- IARSLCE embraces research conducted through collaborative, participatory, community-engaged approaches. These often give voice to and value the perspective of silenced and subordinated groups and communities with the explicit aim of improving the lived experiences of those individuals. IARSLCE acknowledges that this kind of research, which is often referred to as activist or social justice research, does not make claims to neutrality and aims to create societal transformation grounded in the goal of eliminating racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of subordination, and employing methods that empower subordinated groups by making links between theory and practice. Social justice research recognizes, legitimizes, and privileges the voices of oppressed and subordinated groups in creating actionable knowledge.
- IARSLCE focuses its work on the development, implementation, production, and dissemination of research and the elements and issues (e.g., development of theory, instruments, conceptual frameworks, etc.) that support the advancement of research.
- IARSLCE advances research that examines the utility and impact of engagement with and within diverse communities (e.g., policy makers, funders, community leaders, community members, other service-learning and community engagement organizations, education administrators, practitioners, and novice and veteran researchers). Work that investigates the questions of engagement from both the educational perspective and community perspective is critical. There is much to learn about the value of engagement from the perspective of community stakeholders and the Association must enhance its efforts to include them in its work.
- IARSLCE is an international association and thus continues and enhances its efforts to engage scholars from around the world in all aspects of its work and is to be a desirable venue for a global network of scholars to disseminate their research.
- IARSLCE is to be seen as a community for researchers and practitioners to gather in order to learn about, share, and advance the latest research on service-learning and community engagement, and its application.
- IARSLCE is to be an influential player in setting the research agenda for the service-learning and community engagement field.
- IARSLCE connects more intentionally with the many other service-learning and community engagement associations and organizations around the world, many of which are seeking to increase their focus on research.

Implications for IARSLCE:

- As a research association, the focus of the Association's work is *research* as well as greater theoretical grounding for such research. The association promotes more and better research in ways that advance understanding of all forms of community engagement. Building on its foundational roots, its work is about promoting research studies, building and interpreting theories and conceptual frameworks that contribute to research, strengthening instrumentation for research, examining methodologies, setting research agendas, and other important work that advances research across the full range of issues that inform community engagement. Included in this work is critical analysis of research that includes debates, discussions, and deep analyses of the past, current, and future research in the field. While research has been an important part of the Association's work, the conference program and the Association's publications have included works that are not anchored in issues of research. For example, there have been conference sessions that center on program descriptions with a peripheral program evaluation component. In a research association, the emphasis of such presentations should be reversed so that the focus is on the evaluation that was conducted. As such, the work would foreground the evaluative elements, such as a description of the evaluation conducted, the questions pertaining to community engagement that were asked and investigated, what was found, and its potential significance for building theory and/or enhancing practice.
- As a research association, sessions at the conference and articles in the publications that present engaged scholarship are based on research (investigations or other explorations) that help us to better understand the phenomenon of engaged scholarship rather on merely describing scholarship that was produced *through* community engagement. For example, a session on how community-engaged activities would be appropriate for IARSLCE if the work shared was rooted in an investigation (or development of a conceptual framework) of a particular approach to engaged scholarship and the implications for service-learning or community engagement in doing community-engaged scholarship in this or other issue areas. A session that provides an example of how a scholar doing community-engaged work was able to achieve tenure by organizing his/her promotion and tenure portfolio in a certain way is not about research and is not appropriate for the Association.
- IARSLCE is explicit in encouraging research conducted through collaborative research methods used to study service-learning and community engagement as well as studies that help to better understand the dynamics and outcomes of collaborations between community and educational entities (across the educational spectrum). This could mean inviting more attention to methods through which researchers undertake collaborative research on broader societal and institutional impacts and pre-conference workshops focused on building capacity for methods such as Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR).
- The field is in great need of a robust and high quality international forum that presents the latest research on service-learning and community engagement. The

international community is hungry for more critical analyses and debates about research and research agenda; more discussion of various methods; and an intellectual forum that sets the standards and direction for research on service-learning and community engagement across all forms and levels of education (K-12, undergraduate, graduate, and lifelong) and across all national borders. The Association provides that forum and platform. To do this, it has chosen to move away from being an Americo-centric association to become one that is involved in and providing leadership to service-learning and community engagement research taking place around the world. Having a greater presence in the international associations that are working in this field — many of which are building robust research agendas and consortia — helps the Association build a global reputation that lives up to its name.

The practices of the Association must reflect these implications. These practices include, amongst others, peer review processes used within the conference and publications, conference program development, editorial board and reviewer selection and preparation, and the creation of opportunities to enhance member capacity to contribute research such as that specified within this statement. The Association encourages its membership to form special interest groups, otherwise known as SIGS, to coalesce member interest and generate scholarly partnerships around particular topics germane to research on service-learning and community engagement. SIGS provide a means for members to generate greater visibility for bodies of work they find important, and the members involved in the development of that work, within the Association.

As one step to realize ongoing refinement of this document, this board-adopted reaffirmation statement will be housed on the Association's website and we will open to ongoing comment and discussion by the membership.

Adopted by the 2013-2014 IARSLCE Board of Directors:

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