

Interview with Hank Liese, Associate Professor – Social Work, University of Utah

By Tim Stanton, Stanford University¹

1. What motivated you to do engaged work?

I've always had a charitable impulse. Maybe it's hereditary or else it was in the environment. I've always been a doer, a volunteer in the non-profit sector – on boards and committees. So it goes way back.

When I got to the University of Utah in 1993, I didn't know what service-learning was, or civic engagement. They weren't on my radar screen. But then when there was a vacancy on the faculty board for the Bennion Center, I was asked to join by Irene Fisher (director). Through that connection, which began in 1994 I began to get an understanding of this work. Irene was promoting service-learning and I sat on a board that reviewed course proposals as well as a "Futures Committee" that was planning a long term strategy for building civic engagement into the University. We also established a civically engaged scholars group, and that really drew me in. There I found collegiality, support, and role models like Marshall Welch – faculty who were doing things and writing about it, publishing from it. "Write what you teach," Marshall always used to say. That could be done, should be done, and it was critical for doing this work in an R1 institution.

2. What were the aspects or nature of the work that facilitated appointment and promotion (or created a barrier)?
3. What resources facilitated your appointment and promotion (people, institutional and external policies and programs, sources of funding, etc.)?

I was tenured in 2002-03, and that approach that Marshall advocated really was the main facilitator of my promotion– get engaged, teach service-learning and write about it. There's been glacial change at our institution, but service-learning is coming. CBR coming along. I think the main vehicle was my personal statement, which I prepared for my tenure review. Marshall really helped me with this, encouraged me to carefully explain my commitments and activities in the context of the existing review criteria. I used it to educate my colleagues, who were assessing my work. I tried to articulate the significance of my work. I took a risk in doing this, but I couldn't imagine doing it any other way. I never did get feedback from anyone directly on the statement, though I did get tenure. I guess it didn't hurt, and maybe

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it helped. It was cathartic to do! What else helped me? Certainly there was a closer fit between this work and my discipline than for other people. Better alignment.

Other resources – well again Marshall and the Bennion Center were critical. Now I am a Borchard Fellow again and back on the Futures Committee. We're trying to build a movement, engaged departments, etc. We have a book club and get together and discuss publications.

What's interesting is that I didn't teach a service-learning course until 2004. I was doing a lot of CBR, a lot of work in the community.

4. What were some of the barriers (real or perceived) to your appointment and promotion (people, institutional and external policies and programs, and sources of funding)?

The barriers were plentiful and familiar. Deans said, don't do this work until you have tenure. The traditional RPT standards – emphasis on publications. I'm sure my work was less valued, and still is. It does not map nicely on RPT standards and criteria. But, I am on a committee reviewing these, and I know some departments have begun to change their standards to align better with Boyer's notions about scholarship. But, is this the place to start? I wish we had a central, elevated resource for pulling all this work together and making it visible, like they do at Minnesota. But our work does resonate with the V.P. for Academic Affairs who supports the Bennion Center.

5. What do you believe were the critical credentials required for appointment and promotion (e.g., recognition of individual and collaborative efforts, publications, program development, local and national recognition, and service to institution)?

I don't think my publication record was stellar, but it was good enough in this department. So, I was doing well enough, and then my teaching and service were valued. So, I think I met the criteria, as my colleagues understood them. I did all the right things – service to my profession, etc. Organized symposia, presentations, obtained research grants, etc.

6. Please describe any advocacy or critique you received by faculty colleagues, alumni, community members and other people of interest (donors, trustees, etc.) about your community-engaged work.

Marshall was the one. He critiqued my statement, helped me connect what I wanted to say to the guidelines, putting Glassick in there. Also my Bennion family – circle of colleagues. I love to collaborate, but haven't done much in my department. So this group was really critical. I had less support from my social work colleagues, who tended to toe the line.

7. If you had to do it over again, what would you definitely do again, and what might you do differently (if anything)?

I shouldn't have taken a leave of absence to do administrative work while I was assistant professor. That was suicide. Much earlier than I did, I would emulate service-learning professors here who were writing about their service-learning teaching. I wasn't doing service-learning teaching then, but I could connect my teaching to community work, if I'd been more mindful of RPT requirements. But really, I would do it all all over again.

8. Do you believe community engagement helped or hindered your success in garnering a promotion or tenure? Please explain.

Well, I made it, so I guess it helped, but I don't know why. I don't know what propelled me over.... at least it didn't hurt. I guess the fact that I explained my way helped. What hurt was taking four years off and then coming back and having to start up a research agenda all over again. My research probably is not as good or ample as it could have been.

9. What advice might you give to a junior faculty member coming up the ranks who is interested in doing community engaged work?

Go do it! But don't do anything foolish. Think about integrating your civic engagement with existing understandings of scholarship, write it up, and get it published. Adhere to RPT guidelines especially related to publishing. In formal reviews explain yourself – what you are doing to place this work in teaching and research, educate people. Write it up, publish and do that early, so it comes up in your informal reviews. My five year review was successful, because I had publications.