

Changing the Conversation about Higher Education's Public Mission and Work

Friday, April 14, 2006

10:00 - 11:30 a.m.

Michigamme Room, Kellogg Hotel & Conference Center

(Free parking available at the Kellogg Center parking ramp)

Speakers



Theodore R. Alter

*Professor, Agricultural, Environmental, and Regional Economics
The Pennsylvania State University*

Theodore R. Alter's work focuses on leadership and organizational change, the scholarship of engagement in higher education, economics, and comparative rural development policy.



Scott J. Peters

*Assistant Professor, Education
Cornell University*

Scott J. Peters' research studies combine the history of American higher education's public mission and work with the civic practices of contemporary academic professionals and community educators.

Peters and Alter, along with N. R. Jordan and M. Adamek, have co-edited a new book, *Engaging Campus and Community: The Practice of Public Scholarship in the State and Land-Grant University System* (Dayton, OH: Kettering Foundation Press).

Abstract

Implicit in most conversations about the public mission of state and land-grant universities is the assumption that the proper role of faculty is simply to provide scientific information and technical assistance to external constituencies. This view implies that faculty should, and do, work from a stance of disinterested neutrality; it also shapes expectations and assumptions about the nature and meaning of such work.

Through individual and focus group interviews, we have found that faculty in public institutions often do portray themselves as neutral providers of technical assistance and information. However, in telling and interpreting specific stories of their engagement in social problems, many also portray themselves as proactively working on behalf of their conceptions of the public good. This finding raises questions about the social identities and roles of faculty. It suggests the need to reexamine presumptions about what should be asked of and expected from them.

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