



Center for Engaged Scholarship

Dear Faculty Recommender,

Since a graduate student has asked you to serve as a recommender for the Center for Engaged Scholarship dissertation fellowship, we want to explain what we are doing.

We started the Center for Engaged Scholarship (<http://www.cescholar.org>) in response to the ongoing right-wing attacks on science and higher education. These attacks include climate change denial, steady reductions in budgetary support for public higher education, massive funding for conservative think tanks that produce reports based on junk science, direct attacks on academic tenure, and the defunding of some academic institutes whose work is labeled as “political” because it challenges right-wing priorities. The Koch Brothers and other billionaires are also funding institutes on multiple campuses designed to advance an extreme libertarian version of free market economics.

We believe that social scientists must push back against these various threats to the academic enterprise that we value. We also think that high quality social science research can help develop effective and politically feasible alternatives to the reactionary agenda of the Right.

Our first initiative is a dissertation fellowship for Ph.D. students in the social sciences whose work is of high quality and that has the potential to contribute to making U.S. society less unequal, more democratic, and more environmentally sustainable. You can see our past/current awardees [here](#).

We feel strongly that academic work that is motivated by normative commitments, such as a belief in greater equality, can meet the highest scholarly standards. In fact, we think that far too often, the pretense of “objectivity” is used to give credibility to studies that cook the data to reach pre-given policy conclusions. The real difference between good social science and bad social science is not the presence or absence of value commitments, it is rather intellectual honesty, the power and range of the theory that is used, and its ability to account for data that have been collected and analyzed with methods that are careful and rigorous.

We have a three-stage review of our fellowship applications to make sure that our awardees are doing excellent social science. The finalists were reviewed by eleven different people. Last year, we involved one hundred and fifty colleagues in this review process and we will probably use more this year. If you are interested in helping with the review process, please write to us at info@cescholar.org.

Sincerely,

Fred Block, President
Center for Engaged Scholarship