

SECTION III:

**Redefining the Academy
for the Public Good**

CHAPTER 14

Toward the Engaged Institution:

RHETORIC, PRACTICE, AND VALIDATION

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Abstract: This multi-case study of land grant institutions examines how campus executives, faculty, and staff at large research universities articulate and demonstrate their commitment to outreach and engagement. This study also sheds light on how community partners validate and make sense of this commitment. Findings suggest that community partner perceptions of institutional engagement are informed by rhetoric and behavior of top university leaders, and the extent to which faculty and staff successfully form community-university partnerships built on mutual respect, trust, and shared goals. The impact of various organizational structures on community perceptions of engagement is also discussed. The study provides implications for how land grant universities might better align their leadership, organizational structures, practices, and policies to be more responsive to societal needs.

During the last decade, a number of forces have challenged public colleges and universities to be more committed to serving societal needs. One of the most high profile challenges came from the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land Grant Universities established in 1996. In their third report, *Returning to Our Roots: The Engaged Institution*, the Kellogg Commission argued that colleges and universities will face multiple challenges in the decades ahead, and at the center of these challenges is the public perception that higher education institutions are out-of-touch and unresponsive to the needs of society (Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land Grant Universities, 1999).

The Commission's stinging assertions have been supported by other studies conducted in the late 1990s suggesting that land grant institutions have drifted from their missions to be universities of the people. Among them, Bonnen's (1998) extensive critique of the modern land grant institution argued that university outreach and public service "is poorly focused and not well internalized in the value system of the modern university" (p. 39). His analysis led him to conclude, "We must face the fact that the covenant that has governed the university's relationship with society since World War II has dissolved" (p. 45).

In response to these criticisms and growing accountability pressures from legislators and the public, various national organizations have emerged to steer colleges and universities toward a more public agenda. Among them, a national clearinghouse has been established to help faculty members evaluate the quality of outreach scholarship as they seek promotion and tenure (Scholarship of Engagement, 2004) and organizations such as the National Forum on Higher Education for the Public Good have been established to "significantly increase awareness, understanding, commitment, and action relative to the public service role of higher education in the United States" (National Forum on Higher Education for the Public Good, 2004, para. 1).

The movement to create more publicly engaged institutions has gained momentum due to key scholarly contributions that have placed outreach scholarship in a more prominent light. Important works such as *Scholarship Reconsidered* (Boyer, 1990), *Scholarship Assessed* (Glassick, Huber & Maeroff, 1997) and *Making the Case for Professional Service* (Lynton, 1995) have been especially important influences on how faculty work might be reconceptualized to focus on serving broad public interests (Knox, 2001).

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of this study is to contribute to an understanding of how land grant universities might better align their leadership, organizational structures, practices, and policies to be more responsive to societal needs. A unique aspect of this study is that it is concerned with the perspectives of community stakeholders and the factors that these partners believe are key to demonstrating a university's commitment to outreach and engagement.

Stemming from this rationale, two primary research questions guide this study. First, what are the factors that shape or characterize a land grant institution's commitment to outreach and engagement? Stated another way, what is the rhetoric and practice that defines and guides institutional efforts in outreach and engagement? Second, in what ways and to what extent do these institutional

factors inform community partners' perceptions about institutional commitment to outreach and engagement? In other words, how do important stakeholders outside the institution validate and make sense of a land grant university's commitment to outreach and engagement?

Before these questions can be investigated, it is first important to clearly define two key terms in this study: "community" and "engagement." This study recognizes the challenges of defining both terms, as their interpretations are often nebulous and far-reaching in scope. In this study, community refers to geographical regions within states linked by common experiences and concerns (Anderson & Jayakumar, 2002). As for the term, "engagement," this study borrows from a definition as articulated by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) Task Force on Public Engagement. According to AASCU, "The publicly engaged institution is fully committed to direct, two-way interaction with communities and other external constituencies through the development, exchange, and application of knowledge, information, and expertise for mutual benefit" (American Association of State Colleges and Universities, 2002, p. 7).

LITERATURE AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The concept of engagement as it is defined by AASCU is best understood through the lens of open systems theory, which provides the theoretical orientations for this paper. Organizational theorists suggest that higher education institutions face multiple organizational and structural challenges as they attempt to respond to a broad and diverse public agenda. Fundamentally, colleges and universities have been described as "organized anarchies" because they operate with ambiguous goals, unclear procedures, and are vulnerable to changes in their environment (Cohen & March, 1974). Open systems theory applies well to organized anarchies like colleges and universities that are made up of complex and loosely connected coalitions of shifting interest groups (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978) capable of autonomous actions (Glassman, 1973).

Recognizing these organizational characteristics of colleges and universities, open systems theory provides a compelling framework for thinking about the forces that guide institutions to move toward establishing a two-way, mutually beneficial relationship with their communities. From an open systems perspective, engagement with the environment is essential for the survival and functioning of the system:

The interdependence of the organization and its environment receives primary attention in the open systems perspective. Rather than overlooking the environment, the open systems perspective stresses the reciprocal ties that bind and relate the organization with those elements that surround and penetrate

it. The environment is perceived to be the ultimate source of materials, energy, and information, all of which are vital to the continuation of the system. Indeed, the environment is seen to be the source of order itself (Scott, 1992, p. 93).

Within this framework, an interdependent relationship between the university and its external stakeholders is especially important, because the survival of an institution is viewed as dependent on information and resources from these stakeholders. The present movement for public colleges and universities to “reengage” with societal needs has stemmed from threatening information from outside institutions that has pushed colleges and universities to be more responsive to their constituents. Challenged by increased demands for accountability, a skeptical media, and an intense demographic shift in the U.S. population, the leaders of the Kellogg Commission warned, “Institutions ignore a changing environment at their peril. Like dinosaurs, they risk becoming exhibits in a kind of cultural Jurassic Park: places of great interest and curiosity, increasingly irrelevant in a world that has passed them by.” (Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land Grant Universities, 1996, p. 2).

Open systems theory assumes that loosely coupled organizations (Weick, 1976) like colleges and universities are capable of self-maintenance and that they have the ability to reconnect with societal demands to ensure their survival. The literature review that follows relies on this framework to understand organizational challenges facing colleges and universities as they attempt to be more engaged with community partners.

FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH INSTITUTIONAL COMMITMENT TO ENGAGEMENT

Scholars have noted that institutional commitment to outreach and engagement varies significantly across colleges and universities. While most campuses have rhetoric that speaks of their commitment to outreach and engagement, the breadth, depth, and richness of engagement vary significantly across postsecondary education institutions (American Association of State Colleges and Universities, 2002; Holland, 1997; National Association for State Universities and Land Grant Colleges, 2002). The true test of understanding institutional commitment to outreach and engagement is to investigate the attributes of campuses that characterize these activities (Holland, 1997).

The literature reviewed for this study provides a broad conceptual framework for mapping the complex set of factors that explain institutional commitment to service and outreach. These factors can be grouped into the following four categories:

1. institutional history and culture;
2. leadership, organizational structure and policies;
3. faculty and staff involvement; and
4. campus communications.

Institutional history plays an important role in shaping campus culture, mission, and future directions for outreach and engagement activities on campus. For example, in Wisconsin, the University of Wisconsin–Madison’s commitment to service can be traced back to the Wisconsin Idea, the early 20th Century concept of leveraging the expertise of the university to directly improve the lives of state residents (Berry, 1972). This concept continues to shape UW–Madison’s mission and vision for serving the state as the institution strives to update the idea for the 21st Century (Ward, 1999).

Leadership has been identified in many studies as a key factor predicting institutional commitment to outreach and engagement (e.g., Maurrasse, 2001; Votruba, 1996; Walshok, 1999; Ward, 1996; Zlotkowski, 1998). It is known that presidential leaders are critical to legitimizing service activities (Ward, 1996) and that the intellectual and political support of charismatic leaders are important to sustaining institutional commitment to service (Walshok, 1999). In addition, leaders are vital to providing a public face of engagement by hosting events, providing contacts, and playing other roles to support the effort (Walshok, 1999) and are central to sustaining engagement efforts since these individuals are charged with making key decisions about funding outreach programs (Ward, 1996).

A foundational work informing the organizational aspects of this literature review was conducted by Holland (1997), who investigated institutional commitment to service learning. Drawing on 23 case studies conducted between 1994 and 1997, Holland identified and evaluated seven organizational factors strongly associated with institutional commitment to service learning programs: mission, promotion, tenure, hiring, organizational structure, student involvement and curriculum, faculty involvement, community involvement, and campus publications.

As Holland (1997) suggests, organizational structure is important to understanding how an institution views the status of outreach or engagement programs. A recent study suggested that centralized outreach structures are more effective than decentralized structures as they are used to help research

universities track, coordinate, and communicate its service to the state and local communities (Weerts, 2002). Similarly, it is known that outreach and engagement projects housed in a president or chancellor's office can give a clear signal to campus partners that such projects are high priority (Weiwel & Lieber, 1998) and that such organizational arrangements help to recruit faculty to take on projects such as service learning (Bringle & Hatcher, 2000).

Organizational structure is also important at the community level, as community participation in the leadership—shared governance, shared staff positions, and committee work—is continually negotiated and restructured among partners (Bringle & Hatcher, 2000). Evaluation of these partnerships is critical to establishing a sense of ongoing commitment to engagement among participants (Walshok, 1999).

Faculty and staff involvement is also essential to analyzing institutional commitment to outreach and engagement. A strong core of committed faculty and staff is essential to institutionalizing values of service (Zlotkowski, 1998) and their commitment is shaped by organizational rewards and mechanisms that promote or inhibit their participation.

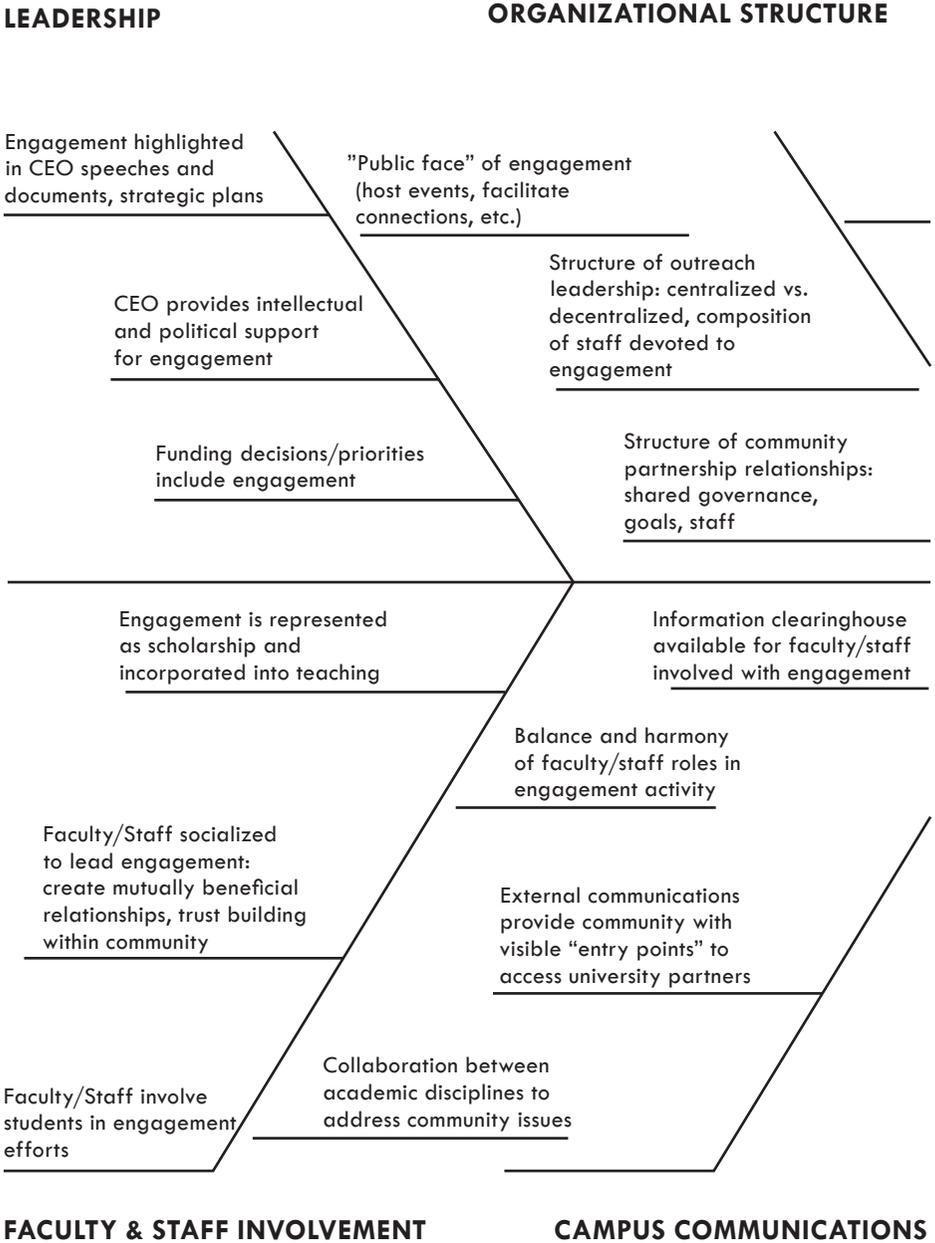
Rigid structures of academic departments can stymie outreach and engagement because they often place intense fiscal and structural constraints on faculty who seek to undertake these activities (Ewell, 1998), and limited funding and poor faculty reward systems are barriers to faculty members' involvement with off-campus service programs (Seldin, 1982). Holland (1997) reports that clarity of public service mission; degree of support for public service in logistics, planning, and evaluation; faculty development; and rewards and incentives were good predictors of whether faculty would be involved in service learning. The extent to which faculty and staff involve students in planning service activities and curriculum is also an important indicator of campus commitment to service (Ward, 1996).

Finally, the cultural aspects of faculty and staff ability to work with community members and among disciplines must not be overlooked. Faculty are socialized within traditional views of higher education and place boundaries on what constitutes "appropriate academic behavior" and thus advance restrictive definitions of research and promotion that inhibit community based work (Dickson, Gallacher, Longden, & Bartlett, 1985). Similarly, the two-way interaction as proposed by leaders of engagement initiatives is often hampered because university research is designed narrowly, with community partners acting as passive participants, not partners in discovery (Corrigan, 2000). Also, effective outreach and engagement initiatives require cooperation among a variety of disciplinary fields to address societal problems, and breaking down academic barriers requires significant attention to organizational structures, management, and budgeting (Amey, Brown, & Sandmann, 2002). The ability of faculty to represent service-related work as scholarship is key to legitimizing these activities (Lynton & Elman, 1987).

Another important piece of analyzing institutional commitment to service is understanding internal and external communication practices of colleges and universities. Internally, studies suggest that strong centralized communications—supported by a centralized database of service activities—can promote campus collaboration in developing outreach programs and reduce duplication of activities (Mankin, 2000). Outside of the institution, community partners need access to “entry points” where they can obtain information about opportunities for collaboration with university partners (Lynton & Elman, 1987). Campus publications that target external stakeholders and articulate the service aspects of their universities can also serve to advance the institution’s public relations efforts (Holland, 1997).

The multi-faceted factors identified in this conceptual framework might be easily lost in a strictly narrative form. Thus, the relationships among these factors are visually presented in the fishbone or cause and effect diagram illustrated in Figure 1. A fishbone diagram is useful because it makes clear the relationships between dependent and independent variables and provides a format for documenting verified causal relationships (Scholtes, 1994). Applied to the conceptual framework of this study, the head of the fish (dependent variable) is labeled “institutional commitment to outreach and engagement.” The large and small bones of the fish represent the macro and micro independent variables affecting commitment to outreach and engagement.

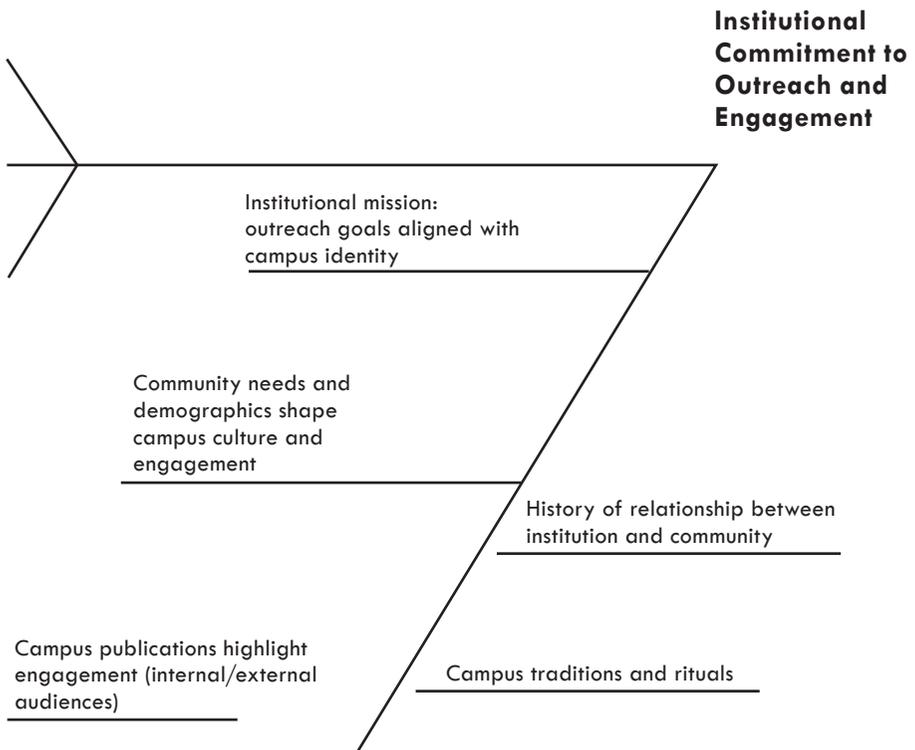
Figure 2. Study Contributions to Conceptual Framework



AND POLICIES

Organizational supports:
rewards, incentives,
promotion, hiring practices,
professional development,
and technical support

Formal and informal
assessment and evaluation
of outreach and
engagement



INSTITUTIONAL HISTORY, CULTURE

METHODOLOGY

The research questions in this study are addressed through a multi-case study of three land grant universities that have historically been active leaders in community outreach and engagement: the University of Illinois at Urbana/Champaign (UIUC), the University of Georgia (UGA), and the University of Wisconsin–Madison (UW). These institutions were selected for investigation primarily due to their strong reputation for supporting outreach and engagement. The reason for selecting a multi-case method for this study is to show generalizability of data (Bogdan & Bicklen, 1992). In other words, data from the three institutions are analyzed and used to make broader conclusions about the link between organizational factors and community perceptions of outreach and engagement at land grant institutions.

Interviews and document review were the primary methods in all three phases of data collection for this study. In the first phase, the campus provost and chief officers overseeing outreach programs were interviewed to get a sense of the history, mission, and culture that guide outreach and engagement at their institutions. Using snowball sampling (Bogdan & Bicklen, 1992), these interviewees provided names of other key informants and documents that could help shed light on institutional efforts to promote outreach and engagement. In phase one, interviewees were asked to name three to five community partnerships underway on their campus that typified the institution's practices in outreach and engagement. Based on these interviews, two engagement initiatives were selected on each campus for further investigation and leaders of these initiatives were interviewed in phase two of the project.

Upon being interviewed, campus leaders of the engagement initiatives under investigation were asked to provide the names and contact information for three to six community partners who would be willing to be interviewed for the project. In phase three of my interviewing process, these community partners were interviewed to gain their perspective on issues of university-community partnerships. Measures were taken to ensure confidentiality of respondents and all data were coded using the procedures outlined by Bogdan and Bicklen (1992). Interview protocol stemmed from this study's conceptual framework. Table 1 provides a breakdown of the 44 interviews conducted for this project.

Table 1: Interviews by campus and stakeholder group

	University of Georgia (UGA)	University of Wisconsin–Madison (UW)	University of Illinois –Urbana, Champaign (UIUC)
Phase 1: Campus executives (provost, outreach senior executives)	3	3	2
Phase 2: Faculty & staff leaders of engagement initiative	4	7	6
Phase 3: Community partners affiliated with engagement initiative	6	7	6
Total interviews	13	17	14

RHETORIC AND PRACTICE OF OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT AT LAND GRANT UNIVERSITIES

UGA, UIUC, and UW share similar histories as major research universities that are defined by their land grant traditions. This theme was heavily referenced throughout campus interviews as respondents resonated to their historic missions to be “universities of the people.” Among the three institutions, Wisconsin is especially linked to its famous organizing principle called the Wisconsin Idea. The century-old concept stems from UW’s early leadership in linking university knowledge to public policy, economic development, and agricultural improvements across the state.

Corresponding to their histories, the missions of all three institutions point to their commitment to public service and outreach in terms of their obligation to “bring resources in the form of professional knowledge to improve quality of life,” as one interviewee put it. The campus mission statements at the three institutions largely reflect an extension type model where the institutions view themselves as widening their borders of expertise to transfer technology and knowledge to the far corners of their states. One provost summarized a general conception of a land grant institution’s role in connecting to societal needs: “The original articulation of the land grant mission is to bring the knowledge of the university to the state. Now

we extend this idea nationally and internationally, literally reaching out to anyone with our products of scholarly and creative work.” My review of campus documents suggests that the concept of engagement on these campuses is still emerging, and that the rhetoric and practice leading the institution toward a two-way relationship with states and communities is largely dependent on the philosophy of campus leaders overseeing outreach activities.

Leadership and organizational structure for outreach and engagement vary significantly across the three institutions. UW has the most decentralized structure and defines outreach broadly across all the schools and colleges. The Provost and the Vice Chancellor for Continuing Programs loosely oversee the programs, but outreach programs are managed, governed, and communicated by schools, colleges, and institutes across the university. Most importantly, a separate UW System campus named UW–Extension (UWEX) controls the budget for outreach across the UW System and shares faculty and staff appointments with UW–Madison and other UW campuses to engage campus faculty in extension work.

The leadership, structure, and culture of UW lend itself to a “hands off” approach toward outreach and engagement by allowing various units to determine their appropriate role in linking their activities to the Wisconsin Idea. Said one campus executive, “Outreach lives in many places at UW, and commitment to this activity varies from department to department.” In this context, it is important to make clear that the face of public service and outreach at UW is shared with the UW–Extension campus, since both institutions share land grant status in Wisconsin. UW–Extension’s explicit mission is to work with the UW–Madison and all the other UW System campuses to make the research and other resources of the University available to Wisconsin residents throughout the state. In this sense, outreach is very high profile in Wisconsin because it has been elevated to the level of being its own institution through the UW–Extension campus, but this may consequently lessen the profile of outreach on the UW–Madison campus.

UIUC and UGA are similar to UW in that the work of outreach on these campuses is conducted in schools, colleges, and institutes across the institutions. The difference, however, is that the UIUC and UGA campuses each operate a high profile office *within their institutions* as the “public face” of outreach and engagement. UIUC, for example, has an office of public engagement that acts as a broker between outside partners and UIUC on programs important to the state. Led by a Vice Chancellor for Public Engagement, UIUC has a strong presence and support for the concept of engagement. Central to this presence was the leadership of former Chancellor Nancy Cantor, who spoke about the values of engagement in speeches, published articles, and vision points on her webpage. Said one interviewee, “Nancy Cantor is committed to the concept of engagement—the concept of shared

decision making versus the expert model. She recognizes the failures of the one-way approach that have historically defined our institutions.”

At UGA, leadership for outreach is the responsibility of a Vice President for Public Service and Outreach. As evidenced by communications on the UGA website, the Vice President uses his position and authority to position outreach and engagement as an important strategic priority for the institution. The Office of Public Service and Outreach is set up to promote visibility and emphasize stewardship of UGA resources aimed to help Georgia communities. The structure reportedly aims to help the institution be responsive to public needs and act in more flexible ways to connect UGA personnel and community partners.

Across UW, UGA, and UIUC, rewards and incentives are beginning to be put in place to encourage traditional faculty to be involved in outreach. For example, UGA has service awards that provide recognition and support for faculty who are engaged in outreach. Similarly, the UW Chancellor hosts an event at his home to recognize those involved with service activities. UIUC also sponsors events to honor and recognize outreach work conducted by UIUC faculty.

While these reward mechanisms are viewed as important, interview data suggests that faculty involvement in outreach and engagement is ultimately contingent upon how this work will benefit their teaching and research. For some traditional faculty members in applied programs, the link can be made more easily. One associate professor in urban and regional planning at UW explained, “The partnership with the community benefits my teaching. Graduate students get a great experience in designing community workshops to study these issues—the community is a perfect laboratory for my students to learn.”

Despite the efforts of some faculty, this study suggests that outreach and engagement at land grant universities is largely happening due to the work of outreach and academic staff, not traditional faculty. For example, UGA operates a separate public service career ladder housing over 800 UGA employees who are solely devoted to this effort. At UW, outreach appointments through UWEX are similar in scope and responsibility. In addition, UWEX buys time from faculty specialists across the UW System who devote a part of their work to outreach. Still, there is evidence that in some cases there is a divide between the “two classes” of employees. One outreach staff member when asked about working with traditional faculty on outreach projects said, “I’m glad that [the faculty] aren’t involved with outreach. Most faculty have academic envy and are chasing Harvard instead of recognizing our charter to serve the people of this state.”

In all cases, it was clear that traditional faculty would not be hired on the quality of their service, but that there is increasing support for engagement scholarship in some pockets of land grant universities. The challenge for all the institutions is that faculty have difficulty knowing how to evaluate this work and

thus give it real consideration in promotion and tenure decisions. Still, tenure guidelines are being updated to “unpack and differentiate” outreach scholarship, as one campus executive put it, so that engagement work gains legitimacy among faculty throughout the institution. For example, the UWEX created a model to assess outreach scholarship for use in tenure and promotion decisions for outreach faculty (Wise, Retzleff, & Reilly, 2002). Despite these efforts, a challenge to assessing outreach is that it has many meanings across land grant institutions and can often be defined as almost anything outside of teaching and research.

Assisting the outreach and engagement effort at these institutions is student involvement through service learning programs and volunteer activities. Students on the three campuses are involved in this work to the extent that faculty in their major/minor areas are involved with engagement scholarship. Interview data suggests that among the three campuses, UGA is in the earliest stages of involving students through service learning, while UW’s efforts in this area have been accelerated by the formation of the Morgridge Center for Public Service. Funded by an endowment from the Morgridge family in 1996, the Center “promotes citizenship and learning through service within local, national and global communities,” (Morgridge Center for Public Service, 2004). At UIUC, the Office of Volunteer Services helps match students with service learning and volunteer activities throughout Illinois, most notably the East St. Louis Action Research Project (ESLARP), which involves over 400 student volunteers each year.

All three institutions investigated in this multi-case study are struggling with establishing useful measurements to demonstrate the impact of outreach and engagement activities. One campus executive staff member summarized it best:

It is hard to measure the quality of public service because we have less consensus about what the outcomes are and should be. It is easy to evaluate the research area because we can look at the quality of the journal, number of citations of the author, etc. A lot of evaluation for service is applied to clinical aspects or the development of patents or total volumes sold.

Campus respondents all acknowledged that they primarily relied on input measures to understand impact of outreach but are trying to move to more qualitative outcome measures. UGA and UWEX have seemingly led the way in developing new benchmarks to measure impact of services and economic impact on clients. However, these techniques are not widespread among the institutions.

At all the institutions, communication pieces promoting outreach and engagement heavily compete for print and air time with many other university programs, especially in the area of research. A documents review suggested that UIUC had the most comprehensive coverage of outreach and engagement activities

that were often integrated into the research and instructional missions of their institutions. The review suggested that publications pertaining to public service seem to have a more unified message when directed through centralized offices that have a public face for engagement (UGA and UIUC vs. UW).

Validation: Community Partner Perspectives of Outreach and Engagement

In this section, the voices of community partners shed light on factors perceived as key to understanding and validating institutional commitment to outreach and engagement. To limit the scope of this paper, interview data from community partners representing one engagement initiative from each campus will be summarized and presented within this study's conceptual framework. These initiatives include the UW Villager Mall project; Clarke County School District–UGA–Athens–Clarke County (ACC) Partnership; and the Office for Mathematics, Science and Technology Education (MSTE) at UIUC.

Responding to failing marks of schools in Athens, UGA's five-year partnership with Athens-Clarke County schools was developed in 2001 to establish at-risk schools as community learning centers "where leadership, resources and accountability are shared among all the partners, parents, and most importantly, students" (CCSD/UGA/Athens Community Partnership for Community Learning Centers, 2003). A wide range of school administrators, community partners, and UGA faculty, staff, and students collaborate in problem solving through action teams that address curriculum, community and parent involvement, educator preparation, and other components of education.

In Madison, Wisconsin, the UW joined a group of neighborhood associations called the South Metropolitan Planning Council (SMPC) to improve quality of life on South Park Street, an area of the city troubled by significant urban problems related to lack of affordable housing and persistent poverty. In 1998, the UW made a five-year commitment to lease space in the Park Street Villager Mall to play a role in training the community, providing expertise and resources to build capacity in neighborhoods, and to mobilize community teams to work on key issues such as housing and transportation. The initiative involves a large group of community partners and UW faculty, staff and students.

Finally, the University of Illinois' MSTE program was established in 1993 to support technology-based teaching and learning at the K–16 level. The MSTE program facilitates education reform in mathematics, science, and technology through a set of high-tech networks and communities (Reese, 2002). Innovative web-based modules provide standards-based, technology-intensive math and science instruction for students, teachers and faculty at all levels. The MSTE

website receives over 100,000 hits per month to access its programs. The program is guided by an advisory board consisting of UIUC faculty, staff, and K–16 teachers and administrators who assist in program design.<Head/Subhead>*Leadership.* This study suggests that community perceptions about institutional commitment to outreach and engagement are informed by the rhetoric and behaviors of top executives at each of the institutions. One community member involved with the UW Villager Mall explained: “There is a sense among us that commitment to this project runs deep. The Chancellor’s Office has highlighted this initiative in a special event and the university can use this initiative to its credit.” A community member in Georgia also recognized the role of formal institutional leadership saying, “It took the Deans level leadership to change the culture—the feeling that [the faculty] were doing service work despite their real duties of research.”

Most importantly, community members from all the institutions felt that top-level leadership was crucial to sustaining their particular initiative. At UIUC, some community partners involved with the MSTE program were worried about institutional leaders applying pressure to make the program primarily a research-oriented office and its implications for the unit’s mission and sustainability. In Athens, one community partner said, “How long will UGA fund staff to do this work? What if the Dean of the College of Education moves or if the superintendent takes a new job?” At both the community partner and institutional levels, campus leadership was viewed as key to understanding the sustainability and commitment to engagement initiatives.

In sum, the study suggests that institutional responsiveness is best understood by observing top-level leadership, and that responsiveness is often the result of threatening action outside the institution. For example, in the Villager Mall (UW) and Athens-Clark County (UGA) case studies, outside forces propelled institutional leaders to take collective action in response to adverse conditions outside the institution. At UW, the declining state of Park Street threatened the vibrancy of the gateway to the campus, igniting action at the UW Chancellor’s Office to address the issue. Similarly, the ACC–UGA initiative was spurred on by the pending risk of closing two area elementary schools.

Faculty and staff attitudes and involvement. The findings of this study support previous literature suggesting that structure, promotion and tenure, and organizational issues are important factors enabling faculty and staff to take on leadership roles in outreach and engagement. However, from the perspective of community partners interviewed in this study, socializing faculty and staff to work effectively with community members is just as important as building organizational mechanisms and policies to encourage faculty and staff participation. In other words, community partners informed me that one must go beyond analyzing structural and organizational factors when studying commitment to engagement

and more carefully investigate the cultural and social factors that underlie these structures and organizational. For example, when asked what factors were most important to building productive working relationships with the university, the most common answer was “mutual respect and communication.”

There is evidence that faculty and staff can, at times, be both the best evidence of institutional commitment to outreach and engagement, or the most damning evidence against it. The cases of successful faculty and staff involvement with the community were primarily evident at the level of providing expertise and service to the community on a particular project, such as housing, transportation, or educational issues. As the ACC–UGA example demonstrated, faculty and staff made trips to the school and offered expertise and personal support in a way that “inspired success,” as one community partner put it. Others alluded to the strong personal relationships that some faculty members have built with the community over time and how this impacts the perception of the institution’s commitment to engagement. As one community partner involved with the MSTE program pointed out, “[The MSTE staff] are good people who got into education for the right reasons and they are passionate and believe that their work will improve education. The partnership with MSTE works because [the MSTE staff] care about being successful for the kids versus protecting their own curriculum.”

The most obvious barriers to successful engagement in these case studies are governance centered—how the faculty and staff relate to community partners in setting up the partnerships. It was clear that power issues are constantly being negotiated throughout the formation of the partnerships, and that trust may wax and wane during their formation. Evidence of conflict arose in two of the three partnerships. Said one frustrated community member:

The university must do what they say they are doing... if this is an initiative of equals, act like equals. Turn off your cell phone. Don’t take the call in front of all of us. If you are that important have someone else join us.

Similarly, use of language was important, as some community partners smirked that the university typically lists “university” first when describing “university-community” partnerships. However, some leaders of these initiatives are aware of the importance of language and have made efforts to ensure the evenhandedness of the university’s profile with the community.

Organizational structure. Reviewing data from this study, it is clear that organizational structure is a challenge to facilitating engagement. The organized anarchy (Cohen & March, 1974) of complex land grant universities was acknowledged at all levels of interviews, but especially from community partners. As the previous analysis revealed,

organizational structure of outreach varies across the campuses and had some effect on how community members viewed the accessibility of the institution.

One community respondent summarized:

It is hard to get to know a place as complex as the UW. We often don't know what is available on campus to even ask for help. Our council is still trying to figure out how we can access the entire UW as a resource and this is difficult given complexity of the institution.

Said another who expressed frustration with the organizational structure of the decentralized nature of campus, "I felt like I was sent through this maze to the point that I almost lost interest [in participating in the program]. It is overwhelming in size and we didn't know who to talk to first." On the other hand, community partners in Illinois noted that participation in UIUC programs was enhanced through the formal creation of the Partnership Illinois program facilitated by the Vice Chancellor for Public Engagement. One community member said, "We tried for two years for people to work with us and nobody would even talk to us. Our opportunities expanded when the Vice Chancellor [for Public Engagement] got involved."

Despite these successes, a central challenge to engagement is that outreach and engagement is happening far beyond the boundaries of a central administrative unit, even within the most centralized outreach structures like UGA. Subsequently, the complex web of outreach and engagement activities makes it difficult to harness and understand the breadth and depth of these activities, even at the highest levels of leadership. As one community member put it, "The truth is, even the Chancellor's Office doesn't know what is all going on throughout campus and who has what expertise."

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

In this study, organizational factors most strongly associated with community partner perceptions of institutional commitment to outreach and engagement were best understood through the domains of leadership, organizational structures, and faculty and staff involvement.

An important finding of this study is that leadership at the top levels of the institution is critical to demonstrating commitment to outreach and engagement—both in the institutional context and the community partner context. As much of the literature suggests, top-level leadership serves to legitimize and reward engagement activities among university participants. This study further suggests that leaders at the executive level have an important role in assuring community partners that the initiative is sustainable, important, and valued within the

institution. Leaders demonstrate this commitment in rhetoric and by providing a public, high profile face to these activities. An implication of this finding is for institutions to increase the visibility of campus leaders in communities where engagement is a high priority.

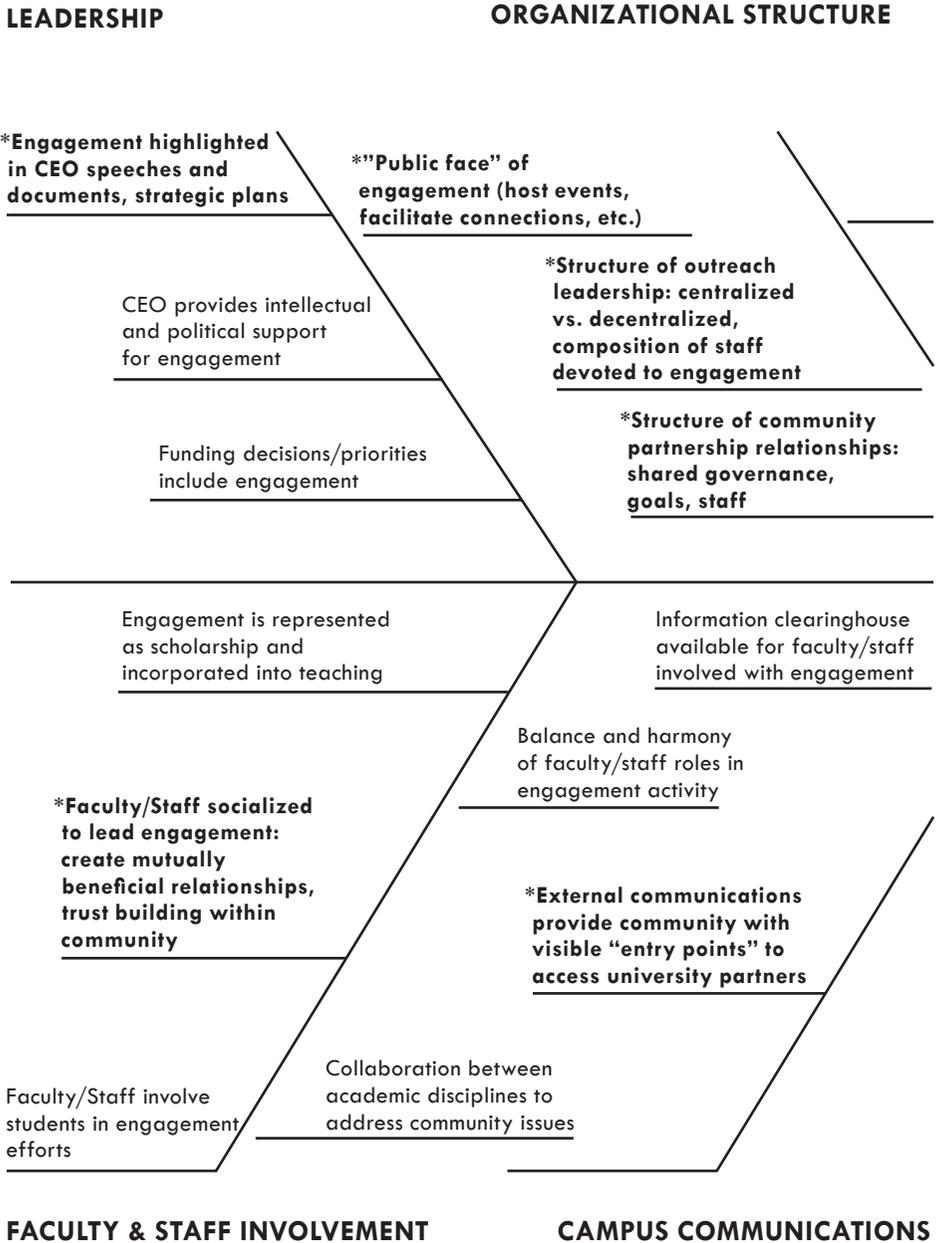
However, while leadership is important, this study suggests that work at the ground level is essential to backing up the rhetoric of institutional leaders. For example, in addition to providing formal infrastructures and rewards to foster engagement activities, professional development programs must carefully prepare university personnel to build trust and mutually beneficial relationships with community partners. A main finding of this study is that developing an academic culture to support community work is critical to developing successful partnerships and plays an important role in demonstrating institutional commitment to engagement. One possible strategy is to develop an Outreach and Engagement Academy whereby faculty and staff are trained by experienced leaders of engagement representing both the campus and community. Such a program has been recommended by members of NASULGC's Extension Committee on Organizational Policy (National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges, 2002). In Wisconsin, UWEX has developed a training program called the Extension Administrative Leadership Program (EALP) whereby faculty and staff who are a part of engagement work on UW campuses can enhance their professional competence and prospects for moving up the career ladder.

This study also provides implications for organizational structure. Findings suggest that community members examine the governance and organizational structure of the community-university partnerships to understand the power dynamics that define the institution's role in the community. Building collaborative structures was often cited as a critical piece of facilitating joint problem solving, community-based solutions, and fostering trust with community partners.

In addition, this study cautiously supports other literature (Weerts, 2002) suggesting that a centralized outreach structure such as the Office of Public Service and Outreach at UGA or Office of the Vice Chancellor for Public Engagement at UIUC may help facilitate access into the institution and provide community members with a recognizable structure that legitimizes outreach and engagement activity. This finding supports neo-institutional theorists who contend that organizational structures themselves can serve as an important signaling mechanism to the organization's constituencies about the values of an organization (Scott, 1992).

Figure 2 revisits the fishbone diagram from Figure 1 and illustrates how the findings from this study contribute to its conceptual framework. Marked by asterisks and bold type, the revised framework highlights key influences within leadership, organizational structure, faculty staff involvement, and communication that play an important role in validating commitment to outreach and engagement.

Figure 2. Study Contributions to Conceptual Framework

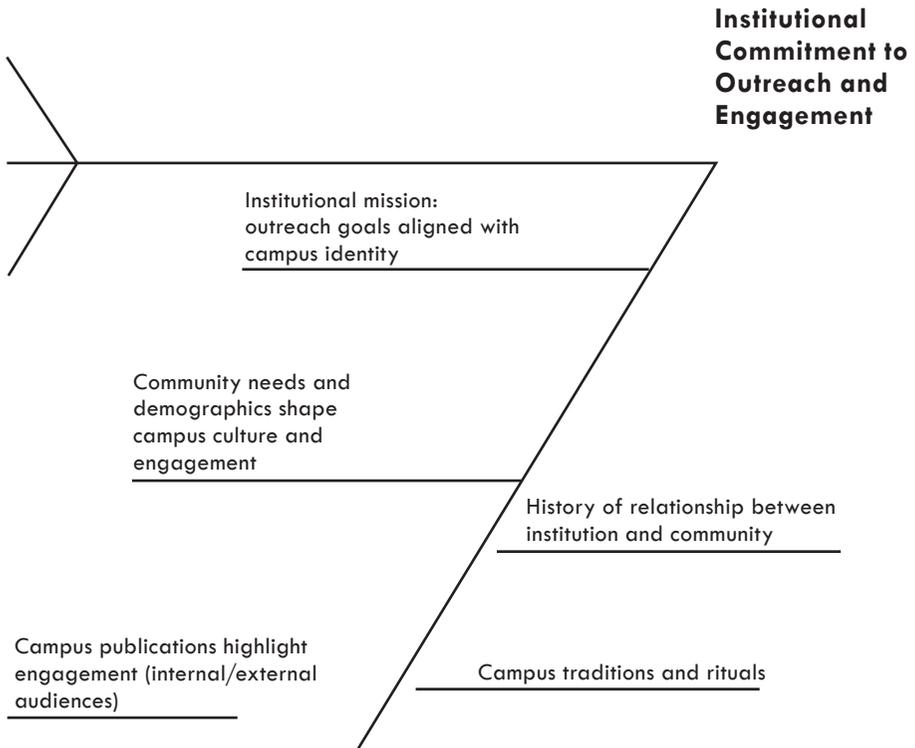


AND POLICIES

Organizational supports:
rewards, incentives,
promotion, hiring practices,
professional development,
and technical support

***Factors identified by
community partner as
a key to validating
campus commitment to
outreach and engagement**

Formal and informal
assessment and evaluation
of outreach and
engagement



INSTITUTIONAL HISTORY, CULTURE

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Finally, some limitations are important to address at the conclusion of this study. Most importantly, this study recognizes the many complexities associated with studying the public service and outreach mission of colleges and universities. While an attempt was made to place parameters on this study, it is understood that organizational systems and definitions associated with outreach and engagement opportunities are multifaceted and often defined in a variety of ways. Put simply, this study offers one perspective on a very large issue that deserves more in-depth analysis.

Furthermore, this emerging model requires more data before firm conclusions and implications can be made that affect institutional policy and strategy. Additional interviews and case study sites would provide richer perspectives into the issues raised in this study and would strengthen its conclusions.

There is a wealth of opportunity for future research building on this study. This research suggests that the organizational structure of outreach and engagement be studied in more detail so that firmer conclusions might be made about the effects of centralized vs. decentralized structures on how community partners perceive institutional commitment to engagement.

Finally, an important area of research is to investigate the effect of outreach programs on public and political support for the institution. As the introduction to this paper suggested, engagement is viewed as vital to the future of public higher education, and institutions must be committed to this activity in order to remain relevant and deemed worthy of public investment. Additional research in this area would provide multiple benefits to practitioners, policymakers and interested scholars committed to aligning institutions to be responsive to their public service roles.

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