Journal of Higher Education Outreach & Engagement

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Reflective Essays

David J. Weerts
University of Minnesota

Creating sustainable revenue streams to support community engagement is critical to building engaged colleges and universities. Drawing on social cognition theories within the organizational science literature, this article explores how community engagement professionals (CEPs) can promote sensemaking and organizational learning in ways that promote engagement as a pathway to institutional sustainability. Specifically, this article explores ways in which engagement can be positioned to differentiate institutions from their competitors, attract enrollment, and bolster public and private support for an institution. Toward these ends, this article makes connections among campus engagement identity, retention and completion, enrollment management, state relations, grant-writing strategy, advancement/alumni relations, and marketing and communications. Practical tools are provided to help CEPs lead strategic conversations about engagement as a means to promote institutional health and vitality.

Emily M. Janke
University of North Carolina Greensboro

Rebecca Dumlao
East Carolina University

Due to their work engaging with diverse people representing varied institutions and community settings and addressing diverse issues and topics, community engagement professionals (CEPs) must serve as boundary spanners *(Child & Faulkner, 1998; Janke, 2009)* across differences. Quite often, interpersonal, organizational, cultural, and other differences lead to tensions and conflict. Though CEPs enter into positions and situations in which conflict exists, or is likely to exist, few have been professionally prepared to manage interpersonal conflict. Drawing on a competence-based approach to communi-

cating about interpersonal conflict *(Cupach, Canary, & Spitzberg, 2010)*, this essay suggests key communication capacities, including motivation, knowledge, and skills to manage conflict, even positively transforming conflict in ways that build understanding and relationships. Conflict management is not about learning a single model or a specific script to "end all conflicts." Instead, conflict management involves developing competency with constructive practices through intentional, sustained effort.

Elizabeth Tryon
University of Wisconsin

Haley Madden
University of Wisconsin

Community engagement professionals (CEPs) often must develop and maintain equitable, high-quality relationships with community partners while supporting student learning and civic development through cocurricular community engagement or for-credit community-based learning programs. Lack of alignment between campus goals and values and those of communities creates challenges for CEPs. Our community partners have expressed the feeling that students were not adequately prepared for community engagement and that it is the university's job to prepare them. To support partnerships in inclusive and equitable ways, CEPs need to be skilled and comfortable with some critical, complex topics before they can train students or provide professional development to instructors. This reflective essay examines specific strategies for CEPs doing this work, informed by the literature, feedback from community partners and social justice training professionals, and classroom experience. Topics addressed include social identity, systems of privilege and oppression, cultural humility, and institutional–community power dynamics.

H. Anne Weiss
Indiana Campus Compact

Kristin E. Norris
Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis

This essay examines the inquiry activities that community engagement professionals (CEPs) can utilize to support organizational learning. We advocate for an inquiry approach that focuses on improvement and informing community-engaged practices and organizational change. By unpacking why inquiry is imperative

for CEPs and outlining the tensions that may arise, we introduce three concepts: inquiry consists of different yet connected activities including, but not limited to, assessing student learning; CEPs are key knowledge workers in higher education; and, finally, CEPs can and should leverage inquiry to inform institutional planning and systematically align policies, processes, and procedures to demonstrate our public missions for society and other key stakeholders.

Jorge Horacio Atiles
Oklahoma State University

The community engagement professional (CEP) plays a critical role in engaging faculty, staff, and students with communities. In order to do this in the most effective way, this essay advocates for CEPs to become familiar with the Cooperative Extension system and develop competency for engaging Extension personnel, even when those personnel are not a part of the CEP's home institution. The essay extends the work of Dostilio et al. *(2017)* on preliminary competencies for the community engagement professional by identifying additional competencies, organized as knowledge, skill, and dispositions, that can help CEPs work with the Cooperative Extension system to maximize engagement opportunities for faculty, staff, and students. This essay also includes ideas for implementing competency training for CEPs. Conclusions include thoughts on preparing the community engagement professional to learn and collaborate with Cooperative Extension to enrich the academic experience and benefit the communities they serve.

Research Articles

Paul J. Kuttner
University of Utah

Kara Byrne
University of Utah

Kimberly Schmit
University of Utah

Sarah Munro
University of Utah

Over the past 50 years, colleges and universities have taken on increasingly important roles as anchor institutions in U.S. cities, partnering with local communities to promote development and well-being. Such community–campus partnerships rely on the work of community engagement professionals (CEPs), staff tasked with administering, coordinating, supporting, and leading engagement efforts at institutions of higher education. The preliminary competency model for community engagement professionals *(Dostilio et al., 2016)* lays out the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and commitments needed to perform this work. However, place-based approaches to engagement have been underrepresented in the emerging literature. The authors contribute to this conversation with a case study of partnership management work at University Neighborhood Partners at the University of Utah. Through this case, we highlight key competencies for engaging in place-based community development, suggest additional competency areas for the model, and explore how an understanding of CEP competencies is enriched and complicated by staff positionality.

Kira Pasquesi
University of Colorado at Boulder

Lane Graves Perry, III
Western Carolina University

B. Tait Kellogg
Tulane University

This article presents a qualitative study designed to examine the long-term career objectives of individuals building careers as community engagement professionals (CEPs). CEPs administratively support engagement between a college or university and broader communities. We employed a team data analysis approach called consensual qualitative research to describe the long-term career objectives of CEPs and infer drivers, or key influences, of future career pathways. Data were drawn from 314 responses to the open-ended survey question "What are your long-term career objectives?" Findings offer insight into the professional lives and roles of CEPs by articulating the body of long-term career objectives that inform a diversity of career trajectories in the field. We review the study purpose, relevant literature, research methods, findings, and implications for future research.

Erica K. Yamamura
Seattle University

Kent Koth
Seattle University

Place-based community engagement (PBCE) is a contemporary form of community engagement gaining popularity throughout the United States. PBCE provides a comprehensive strategy for universities and communities to more democratically partner with each other through long-term efforts focused on distinct geographic areas. Drawing from one-on-one interviews, focus groups, and observational data, this research examined the leadership at five institutions currently engaged in PBCE. In particular, this research involved an analysis of the leadership role of community engagement professionals within a framework of the five elements of PBCE *(Yamamura & Koth, 2018)*. Findings revealed three leadership competency areas for community engagement professionals: (1) Managing geographies of place and space, (2) actualizing a 50/50 approach to community and university impact, and (3) leading with multicultural competency and inclusion. The findings illuminate the need for stronger training and development in these areas, especially for institutions that seek to start a PBCE initiative.

Ashley Farmer-Hanson
Buena Vista University

Julianne Gassman
University of Northern Iowa

Emily Shields
Iowa & Minnesota Campus Compact

This research study analyzed the role of CEPs in strategic planning processes by examining the use of the civic action plan *(Campus Compact, 2018)*. To ascertain whether institution-wide planning efforts around civic and community engagement create new opportunities for CEPs to take on institutional leadership roles, we interviewed CEPs who were involved in creating civic action plans at their campuses and examined their role in plan development, the competencies most utilized in that process, and the most important support for building competencies and framing the change process. These interviews gave new insights into how strategic planning processes have contributed to the growth, development, and elevation of the role of CEPs on campus and the types of support structures they found valuable. The conclusions will inform future planning work by CEPs and support for that work by organizations. We make preliminary recommendations for change, process accountability, development, and future research.

Projects with Promise

Sylvia Gale, Terry Dolson, & Amy L. Howard
University of Richmond

This article describes the data lab, an assessment method that could, the authors argue, help community engagement professionals (CEPs) align their assessment efforts with commitments and capacities named in the community engagement professionals competency model, contributing to democratic engagement and helping to resist neoliberal pressures in higher education. The data lab method employs a playful approach to making sense of data, utilizing extended and applied metaphors and involving all stakeholders in community-engaged work in collaborative meaning-making. Through the ongoing and iterative practice of data labs, stakeholders are invited to better understand and make changes to their collective work in implementing more democratic practices in the institution.

Dissertation Overviews

Kara Trebil-Smith
Coe College

This dissertation overview summarizes a study exploring how community engagement professionals (CEPs) can build their capacity to practice inclusion of racially minoritized students. With a foundation in empowerment evaluation, this participatory action research (PAR) project was designed as a professional development experience within a research study. Study participants included eight CEPs who were recruited through their affiliation with one state Campus Compact network. Qualitative data analysis revealed that as a result of the experience, participants demonstrated mostly cognitive and affective outcomes rather than behavioral outcomes. Positive outcomes were largely attributed to being a part of a community of learners, among individuals with a shared purpose and context. Participants improved their capacity to address personally mediated racism rather than institutionalized racism, reflecting a gap between the values CEPs develop through their education and field experience and the skills they actually practice in their professional roles.

From the Guest Editor...

Expanding Notions of the Community Engagement Professional: Introduction to the Special Issue

Lina D. Dostilio

*I*first considered exploring the role of staff in supporting community engagement in higher education for my dissertation topic. Instead, mentors in the field of community engagement urged me to investigate questions of those who directly engaged one another and the outcomes of engagement. I ended up studying community–campus partnerships that exhibit qualities of democratic engagement. I don't regret it: Learning how democratic engagement *(Saltmarsh, Hartley, & Clayton, 2009)* is expressed through the qualities and processes of partnership has deeply informed my work over these years; this area is foundational to the practice of community engagement in higher education. I now hold a leadership position in which supporting the University of Pittsburgh's place-based community engagement and its myriad partnerships is part of my responsibilities. These efforts are guided by the ethics of democratic engagement, mutual benefit, and the processes and qualities I observed in that initial research *(Dostilio, 2014)*. However, the mechanisms of support that enable and influence high-quality community engagement, including the influence of support personnel, are still very compelling to me.

The people who support others involved in community engagement are fairly influential *(Dostilio, 2017b)*, though typically not through positional authority but through relational leadership and practice. They have diverse touchpoints throughout the campus and in various communities. For example, many staff are in roles that facilitate faculty development, student civic development, community partnership development, and assessment. As they introduce people to campus–community engagement and resource them, they guide the practice of those stakeholders in ways that advance whatever ethics of community engagement are valued by the support person. Because their positions are typically housed in a central location within the organization (outside any one school), they often have a systemic vantage point that positions them to maximize opportunities to advance engagement across the institution. They are also typically members of community engagement associations and networks and read community engagement jour-

nals, thereby staying abreast of leading-edge practices and bringing them back to their local environments. In short, they shape community–campus engagement in ways that few others might within an institution of higher education.

Late in 2014, I had the opportunity to partner with Campus Compact in establishing the Project on the Community Engagement Professional. The goal of the project was to advance community engagement across Campus Compact member institutions by better supporting personnel to practice second-generation community engagement *(Welch & Saltmarsh, 2013)*, based on democratic engagement and an unapologetic commitment to equity and inclusion. We recruited a group of 15 research fellows from across the country who shared an interest in learning more about engagement support. They included Jodi Benenson, Shannon Chamberlin, Sean Crossland, Ashley Farmer-Hanson, Keven Hemer, Kortney Hernandez, Romy Hübler, Tait Kellogg, Laura Martin, Kira Pasquesi, Lane Perry, Johanna Phelps-Hillen, Melissa Quan, Kara Trebil, and Laura Weaver.

Our initial goal was simple: Uncover and name the work of people who have formal administrative responsibilities to support community engagement on campuses of higher education, people we chose to call *community engagement professionals (Dostilio & Perry, 2017)*. The project built on previous work that described the roles of support personnel or intermediaries *(Bartha, Carney, Gale, Goodhue, & Howard, 2014; Jacoby & Mutascio, 2010; McReynolds & Shields, 2015)*.

The project began with a systematic literature review of more than 460 pieces of scholarly literature, and from this literature review the team articulated a list of knowledge, skills, dispositions, and critical commitments important for CEPs to develop across six areas: (1) leading change to advance community engagement within higher education, (2) institutionalizing community engagement on a campus, (3) facilitating students' civic learning and development, (4) administering community engagement programs, (5) facilitating faculty development and support, and (6) cultivating high quality partnerships.

That list was then pilot-tested for reciprocal validity *(Welch, Miller, & Davies, 2005)* via survey and focus groups at national conferences of community engagement and service-learning audiences. The refined list of qualities was then further refined and validated through a national survey of self-identified community engagement professionals. More about the model and methods

used to construct the literature review, pilot testing, national survey, and the findings of each can be found within *The Community Engagement Professional in Higher Education: A Competency Model for an Emerging Field (Dostilio, 2017a).*

In each stage, participants and respondents expressed a hunger for the subject and found the list of knowledge, skills, dispositions, and critical commitments validating of them and their work. For some, having a model was a tool of change: a tool to help develop job descriptions, advocate with supervisors for professional development, structure learning communities, and inform mentoring relationships. Since its publication, the model has been used to inform various collective professional development efforts (among staff who work together in community engagement centers, among professionals who learn together and support each other across institutions, and some facilitated by state/regional Campus Compacts for CEPs across member institutions). As a means to further encourage professional development using the model, Marshall Welch and I wrote a self-directed professional development guidebook as a companion to the model *(Dostilio & Welch, 2019).*

The research group realized that a second objective of the project was emerging: to advance the identity and continuous learning of community engagement professionals. The word *professional* elicits many different reactions—for some, reactions of concern. Some people fear that when work is professionalized it becomes technocratic *(Mathews, 1996)* and pathways into the work become exclusionary *(Dingwall, 2008).* The project on the CEP offers a counterinterpretation of *profession* and *professional*, one in which expertise is a coconstructed and evolving idea *(Palonen, Boshuizen, & Lehtinen, 2014);* a professional is always developing, always learning and deepening one's practice, iteratively *(Scanlon, 2011).* In this way, the concept of *professional* advanced within the project rejects the idea of a linear progression between novice and expert and instead promotes continual reflective development.

Even as the initial competency model was developed, the research group saw it as a preliminary offering, one that would need to be continually refined and expanded, just as other competency models are. Thus, a third objective of the project became apparent: The model needed to be continually problematized, expanded, and refined. This special issue does just that: It offers another venue in which to complicate the notion of the community engagement professional and raise additional avenues of knowledge, skill, disposition, and critical commitment. The articles in this special issue

offer an array of new inquiry and insight. It is my hope that these articles spark additional work on the topic of community engagement professionals.

Some articles offer domains of work not included in the initial model (or not addressed in sufficient depth). These include place-based engagement, working with Cooperative Extension, strategic planning, conflict resolution, and resource generation. Yamamura and Koth offer the leadership competencies associated with supporting place-based community engagement. Kuttner, Byrne, Schmit, and Munro lay out partnership management practices key to place-based community engagement and anchor institution work. Atiles describes the practices of Cooperative Extension, including the ways competencies have been developed for Extension staff and faculty, positing that campus-based CEPs would benefit from working collaboratively with their community-based Extension colleagues. Reflecting on interviews with CEPs involved in the development of their campus's civic action plan, Farmer-Hanson, Gassman, and Shields offer insights on the capacities needed for CEPs to support or undertake strategic planning. Janke and Dumlao detail communication capacities that can help CEPs manage the conflict that may arise from interpersonal, organizational, cultural, and other differences. Weerts suggests sensemaking and organizational learning as tools that can help CEPs establish community engagement as a strategy for sustained institutional support, such as resource generation and public support.

Other articles provide deeper exploration of practices within the initial model, such as actualizing critical commitments and assessment. Tryon and Madden reflect on community partner feedback, which underscores the need for students to have significant preparation for community-engaged work. They explain that before offering students and faculty preparatory experiences, CEPs must first attend to their own development of skills and dispositions that prioritize equity and inclusion. Gale, Dolson, and Howard share the practice of data labs as a means to collaboratively interpret data resulting from community engagements and spur democratic organizational change. Weiss and Norris suggest the competency areas generically described as assessment might be better reoriented toward organizational learning, an approach that focuses on improvement and informing community-engaged practices and organizational change.

Finally, a few of the articles offer insights into CEPs and their practice. Pasquesi, Perry, and Kellogg examined qualitative data of CEPs' long-term career aspirations and describe the diverse career

trajectories CEPs expect they will pursue. Trebil-Smith provides an overview of her dissertation, sharing a case study of the ways in which CEPs build their capacity to practice inclusion of racially minoritized students.

Naming and describing the work of CEPs offers the opportunity to develop research agendas that promote theories of effective practice and continue to socialize the field to democratic and inclusive practices. This issue of the JHEOE is an important next step in that trajectory, and the articles within this special issue help to bring complexity and add a diversity of practices to the existing work on community engagement professionals.

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REFLECTIVE ESSAYS

Resource Development and the Community Engagement Professional: Building and Sustaining Engaged Institutions

David J. Weerts

Abstract

Creating sustainable revenue streams to support community engagement is critical to building engaged colleges and universities. Drawing on social cognition theories within the organizational science literature, this article explores how community engagement professionals (CEPs) can promote sensemaking and organizational learning in ways that promote engagement as a pathway to institutional sustainability. Specifically, this article explores ways in which engagement can be positioned to differentiate institutions from their competitors, attract enrollment, and bolster public and private support for an institution. Toward these ends, this article makes connections among campus engagement identity, retention and completion, enrollment management, state relations, grant-writing strategy, advancement/alumni relations, and marketing and communications. Practical tools are provided to help CEPs lead strategic conversations about engagement as a means to promote institutional health and vitality. *Keywords:* community engagement, leadership, institutional advancement

Introduction

*C*reating sustainable revenue streams to support community engagement is critical to building engaged colleges and universities *(Beere, Votruba, & Wells, 2011; Dostilio, 2017; Furco, 2010; McReynolds & Shields, 2015; National Forum for Chief Engagement and Outreach Officers, 2017; Welch, 2016; Welch & Saltmarsh, 2013)*. In today's uncertain financial landscape, engagement centers and programs are not immune to institutional budget cuts that can impede the advancement of community engagement as a core institutional practice *(Fitzgerald, Bruns, Sonka, Furco, & Swanson, 2012)*. In this challenging financial context, community engagement professionals (CEPs) must obtain a wide range of skills, knowledge, and competencies in order to keep engagement sustainable and thriving on their campuses.

The purpose of this article is to offer insights into the strategic role that CEPs can play in positioning engagement to support institutional sustainability. Toward this end, the article differs from other

works that focus on securing financial support for engagement-related centers, projects, or partnerships. For example, sourcebooks such as *The Service and Service-Learning Center Guide to Endowed Funding (Campus Compact, 2004)* provide an excellent overview of practical strategies to create endowments that support community-engaged learning centers or programs. Likewise, resources exist to help engagement leaders plan budgets, locate funding sources, and sharpen proposals to advance community engagement centers or programs (see *Lima, 2009*). Still other guides offer comprehensive training related to grant writing that is applicable for CEPs (see *The Foundation Center, 2004; Licklider, 2012; New & Quick, 2003*).

Complementing these resources, this article focuses on helping CEPs better map their engagement resource strategy with "the big-picture vision of the institution" *(McReynolds & Shields, 2015, p. 22)*. From this vantage point, engagement is not viewed solely as an institutional priority to support, but rather as a means to build diverse revenue streams in support of broader sustainability goals. Such a perspective is informed by Furco's *(2010)* analysis that today's leaders must view engagement "not only as something that primarily benefits the local community or society at large, but also as an essential component for the academy's survival" *(p. 380)*. Applied to the organizational science literature, Furco's *(2010)* view dovetails with that of open systems theorists who contend that reciprocal engagement with the environment is critical to the survival and functioning of organizations of all types. Scott *(1992)* explains:

> The open systems perspective stresses the reciprocal ties that bind and relate the organization with those elements that surround 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. *(p. 93)*

Guided by the open systems view, this article contends that CEPs are uniquely positioned to help their institutions build reciprocal, sustainable partnerships with resource providers to ensure the long-term financial health of their campuses. In examining the role of CEPs through this broad lens, I begin by exploring the unique challenges they face in leading from the middle of their institutions. Then, I discuss how CEPs can help embed engagement within their institution's core identity in ways that contribute to organizational performance and revenue-generating functions

of the institution (e.g., enrollment management, state relations, fund raising, and alumni relations). Drawing on theories of social cognition within the organizational theory literature, I conclude with some tools and practical steps for advancing engagement as a broad-based revenue-generating strategy for colleges and universities.

Resource Development and Challenges of Leading From the Middle

In their book *Reframing Academic Leadership*, Bolman and Gallos *(2011)* explain that many higher education administrators face a common challenge of leading from the middle of their institutions. The authors describe the experience as "a life sandwiched among colliding norms and values, local and global domains and internal and external expectations" *(p. 143)*. Such a description of "leading from the middle" fits the experience of many CEPs who may hold a range of titles, including coordinator, director, or vice president *(Sandmann & Plater, 2009)*. Organizationally, these centers or offices typically serve as a central coordinating office reporting to academic affairs *(Welch & Saltmarsh, 2013)*. From this location, CEPs find themselves at the nexus of managing expectations of students, faculty, community, and administrators to whom they report.

CEPs who lead from the middle face advantages and disadvantages in sustaining and growing funding for engagement as a core institutional practice. One advantage is that engagement centers or offices that are well aligned with the mission and budgetary framework of their institution are more likely to be sustained, even in times of leadership transition *(Jones, 2016)*. In particular, those institutions designated as Carnegie Classified Engaged Institutions commonly provide "hard money" institutional funds for engagement centers rather than relying on grant dollars or "soft funding" to sustain them *(Weerts & Hudson, 2009; Welch & Saltmarsh, 2013)*. It is well documented that reliable, internal financial support is critical to building a robust community engagement agenda *(Beere et al., 2011; Furco, 2010; Holland & Langseth, 2010; Welch, 2016)*.

However, overreliance on institutional funds can lead to some vulnerabilities for sustaining engagement as an institutionalized practice. Senior leaders are faced with increasingly difficult decisions about funding programs of all types. Differential allocation and cross-subsidization are common budget practices employed by senior administrators to fund engagement centers and offices.

Differential allocation refers to funds not directly earned by specific units (typically a combination of state funding and donor funding), whereas *cross-subsidization* involves applying excess earnings from one activity to offset deficits in another. As the state share of total revenues has declined, reliance on state funds and the cross-subsidization strategy is increasingly difficult to sustain *(Fitzgerald et al., 2012)*. One group of land-grant leaders summarized the current budget realities in relation to supporting engagement: "In financially stressful times, it is necessary and appropriate for senior university managers to critically examine funding allocations to all of the organization's functions. Scrutiny of the role of the engagement function clearly will be part of that agenda" *(Fitzgerald, et al., 2012, p. 19)*.

At a time when institutional budgets are likely to remain flat, CEPs continue to seek more staff, more space, and larger budgets as their programs evolve and mature *(Dostilio, 2017; Welch & Saltmarsh, 2013)*. In their review of over 100 successful applications from the 2010 cycle for the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching elective Community Engagement Classification, Welch and Saltmarsh *(2013)* found that two thirds of respondents were building or had built a mechanism for fund raising for engagement. In addition, leaders were exploring ways in which alumni could be involved in supporting community engagement on their campuses *(Welch & Saltmarsh, 2013)*.

Although many CEPs have become more entrepreneurial in raising funds for engagement programs and partnerships *(Welch, 2016)*, they face unique challenges in their capacity to increase and diversify sources of revenue. One challenge is that these offices or centers typically do not function like auxiliary services offices that generate external sales or program revenue to sustain the enterprise (see *Jacobs & Pittman, 2005*). Instead, they are budgeted as part of the overhead of carrying out the academic mission. Another challenge is that CEPs may face a difficult road in collaborating with institutional advancement leaders to support this work. University advancement offices are often organized as constituency-based programs that focus on securing support from alumni and friends of a particular college or academic department. However, as centralized support units, engagement offices do not confer degrees and thus do not have "their own" alumni. CEPs may enter into thorny politics if they are pursuing relationships with alumni that are seen as "belonging" to degree-granting units. Given the pressure to raise money for their assigned constituencies, development

officers may limit access to donors and often steer gift prospects to their own collegiate priorities *(Hall, 2016)*.

Added to these challenges, CEPs have a vast array of expectations and responsibilities in leading engagement-related programs on their campuses. Fund raising is just one component of the position and demands a lot of time and commitment. Only a few elite institutions have the capacity to support a full-time development director who oversees resource development for engagement. For example, a development officer at the Hass Center for Public Service at Stanford University is charged with raising 85% of the Center's operating budget *(Welch, 2016)*. This level of fund-raising support for engagement is atypical for the majority of U.S. colleges and universities.

In sum, "leading from the middle" can be challenging for CEPs as they aim to keep engagement as a vibrant feature of academic life. If an overarching goal of the CEP's work is to transform their institution to become an engaged college or university, the CEP must create mutual understandings about the strategic value of engagement across a range of institutional decision makers and resource providers. Holland and Langseth *(2010)* refer to this process as pursuing the "four Rs": relevance, relationships, results, and resources. Campus Compact's president, Andrew Seligsohn *(2015)*, put it this way: "You are unlikely to achieve anything significant using only the resources directly under your control. . . . you will need other people's money, other people's expertise, and other people's relationships" *(p. 56)*.

CEPS as Educators and Ambassadors: Making Sense of Engagement as a Core Financial Strategy

With the larger goal of institutional transformation in mind, CEPs must begin to view their leadership roles in more expansive ways. Seligsohn *(2015)* described a shift from seeing himself as a department director toward adopting the perspective of an institutional catalyst and strategic leader. He explained, "As director of civic engagement, I decided I could make my university better by seeing myself not merely as the leader of a department, but as an institutional leader facilitating collaboration among campus units and between campus units and communities" *(p. 58)*. Seligsohn's shift in mind-set reflects a reorientation to embracing life in the middle. Bolman and Gallos *(2011)* explain:

In this role, academic leaders embrace the work as an informal educator and diplomat—an emissary shuttling back and forth between different worlds to facilitate mutual learning and productive agreements. Leaders who see the possibilities and bring the necessary skills assist their institutions in developing creative partnerships. *(p.146)*

As educators and ambassadors, CEPs have a unique opportunity to connect engagement to revenue-generating functions of the campus such as enrollment management, state relations, advancement and alumni relations, and marketing and communications. Specifically, CEPs can employ social cognition strategies to help institutional decision makers make sense of engagement in the context of the institution's overall financial health. Found within the literature on sociology of organizations, social cognition strategies emphasize the role of learning and development in facilitating institutional change *(Kezar, 2001)*.

Engagement as an Institutional Niche

A key concept within social cognition theories is "sensemaking," the process of managing meaning of events, processes, or innovations within an organization *(Kezar, 2001; Weick, 1995)*. Within higher education settings, sensemaking involves shaping mind-sets that, in turn, impact campus behaviors, priorities, and commitments *(Kezar, 2014)*. As sensemakers, CEPs can play a prominent role in constructing meaning about the value of engagement as it relates to the institution's overall value proposition and market niche.

To start this cognitive process, CEPs must begin by engaging campus decision makers in conversations about engagement, institutional identity, and competitive advantage. Colleges and universities increasingly compete with one another for students, faculty, research dollars, state appropriations, and philanthropic support *(Martinez & Wolverton, 2009)*. In this competitive landscape, astute campus leaders leverage their institution's core identity with its external image in ways that yield strategic benefits *(Toma, Dubrow, & Hartley, 2005)*. Likewise, an institution's core engagement identity can become a means to position itself among competitors, grow enrollment, and bolster public and private support for a campus *(Weerts & Freed, 2016)*. Creative leaders do this in a way that both affirms the institution's core identity and edits it for strategic advantage (see *Stensaker & Norgård, 2001)*. Stensaker *(2015)* refers to this as

leveraging the "essentialist" and "strategic" purposes of organizational identity. The paragraphs below illustrate how these concepts apply in various institutional contexts.

In the realm of state support for higher education, research suggests that a robust engagement identity can be leveraged to bolster levels of state appropriations for public colleges and universities. Specifically, a longitudinal study found that institutions that positioned community engagement within their core identity had "higher than expected" levels of state appropriations over a 20-year period compared to institutions that did not emphasize engagement as a core practice. Among these outlier institutions, leaders positioned engagement as a competitive strategy to differentiate themselves from other state universities. Innovative leaders capitalized on their campus locations in politically powerful, urban/suburban areas to meet the unique needs of the region. These institutions, primarily regional research universities, were most likely to reward engaged scholarship and value two-way reciprocal engagement as an explicit part of their mission and culture. These institutions differed from institutions falling in the "lower than expected" support category—primarily land-grant and more elite research institutions—that were less likely to reward this work and less likely to view engagement as central to their core campus identity *(Weerts, 2014)*. Simply put, under certain conditions, an institution's engagement identity can be leveraged to improve an institution's competitive position within the complex ecology of state funding for higher education.

A robust, place-based engagement identity has also been shown to boost philanthropic support and broaden the pool of donors to an institution. In the 1980s, declining state support for higher education in Oregon prompted Portland State University (PSU) to distinguish itself from other state institutions. The university adopted engagement as a core leadership position and advancement strategy. This transition was best symbolized by the motto "Let knowledge serve the city," which was inscribed in large letters on a skyway bridge spanning campus to community. By the early 2000s, engagement became central to PSU's identity, and the institution became nationally known for this work. Its first comprehensive fund-raising campaign exceeded expectations, broadening its reach beyond the typical network of alumni donors. Instead, philanthropic dollars flowed from community members who became invested in the work of the institution as a vital community asset. As one major donor to PSU declared, "We didn't attend Portland

State, but we're enrolled in its vision" *(Langseth & McVeety, 2007, p. 125)*.

Similarly, some private institutions are leveraging their engagement identity to attract students and build a distinctive brand. In 2005, Tulane University was nearly decimated by Hurricane Katrina. Following the storm, Tulane made deliberate steps to move engagement to the core of its identity by prioritizing civic learning, creating new centers, and enhancing old centers focused on community engagement. The move resulted in record numbers of applications to Tulane, doubling the number of applications prior to the storm. Students flocked to Tulane since the university was viewed as a key partner in rebuilding New Orleans *(Pope, 2010)*. Today, Tulane continues to prioritize community engagement in its messaging to students. Clicking the "About Tulane" tab on the Tulane webpage *(tulane.edu)* reveals prominent messaging about the institution's core values as they relate to community engagement:

> So, you're looking for world-changing research. So, you're looking to make a difference through community engagement. So, you're looking for a really good po' boy. *You're in the right place. (Tulane University, 2018)*

Another example is Augsburg University, a Lutheran institution located in an immigrant neighborhood near downtown Minneapolis, Minnesota, which has successfully positioned its engagement agenda to compete within a crowded local market of small liberal arts colleges. Augsburg University president Paul Pribbenow has articulated Augsburg's engagement agenda through the theology of generosity, faithfulness, and "the saga of our life as an urban settlement" *(Pribbenow, 2015, p. 6)*. This unique positioning of Augsburg University in both word and practice has resulted in historic levels of giving from its board of trustees *(M. Entenza, personal communication, April 28, 2016)* and recognition of Augsburg as an innovative leader among private colleges in Minnesota *("Augsburg College Leads," 2016)*.

In making sense of the strategic value of a campus engagement identity, CEPs must be attuned to the way that institutional scale and complexity shape understandings of engagement across the campus. Some small private institutions like Augsburg University are distinctively mission-centered and coherent in their identity, but others are sprawling and may hold multiple competing identities. In particular, research universities are characterized by scholars as "organized anarchies" *(Cohen, March, & Olsen, 1972; Birnbaum,*

1991) in which multiple, sometimes conflicting agendas are being carried out simultaneously. In this context, various interpretations of engagement vie for meaning and are occasionally in conflict. For example, many research university leaders are likely to tell the story of engagement through the lens of economic development or technology transfer *(Weerts & Freed, 2016)*. Alternatively, faculty are most likely to articulate this work through the lens of their field or discipline. Across the curriculum, engagement is expressed through a range of intellectual traditions such as civic professionalism, social justice, social responsibility, an "ethic of care," and public work *(Battistoni, 2001)*.

Further complicating these dimensions, large, sprawling research universities often hold multiple organizational identities, some of which are salient to some stakeholders, but not to others. For example, my home institution, the University of Minnesota–Twin Cities, is among the largest and most comprehensive institutions in the United States and is simultaneously understood as a land-grant university, urban university, and member of the prestigious Association of American Universities (AAU). Campus actors give meaning to engagement based in part on which of these identities is most salient to them. Illustrating the complexity of this landscape, a recent study conducted by the University of Minnesota Office for Public Engagement found that members of Twin Cities campus community use 38 proxy terms to describe engagement *(Furco & Ropers, 2016)*.

CEP as Sensemaker: Creating Vehicles for Understanding the Strategic Value of Engagement

The aforementioned examples illustrate how institutions can leverage engagement to affirm their core identities (essentialist perspective) in ways that position them for success in the broader environment (strategic perspective; *Stensaker, 2015*). To successfully position engagement within the milieu of the institution, CEPs must have deep understanding of campus context related to institutional complexity, scale, and formal/informal decision-making structures. Recognizing their unique place within the campus culture and power structure, CEPs can create vehicles to illuminate the connection between engagement and revenue generation at the appropriate levels. At complex research universities, these efforts are likely best directed at the collegiate level where academic deans and their staff are charged with the financial health of their schools

or colleges. In some cases, such efforts might even be directed at the departmental level. At smaller institutions, CEPs might target

Table 1. Facilitating Sensemaking Conversations: Engagement as a Competitive Strategy

Institutional/Academic Unit Identity	Who are we as an institution or academic unit? What are our values and what are we known for? Do we have a narrative from which we derive meaning in relation to our community engagement agenda? What kind of engagement identity should be nurtured given our distinctive mission, history, and culture? What unique assets or strengths does our campus/unit possess to anchor an engagement agenda within this broader identity?
Place	How does our unique location influence the way we view ourselves and stakeholder expectations of us as an engaged campus/academic unit? How do we best leverage our location to provide mutual benefit to our campus and the various communities we serve? What unique community assets are available to advance our engagement agenda?
Resources and Advocacy	In what ways might engagement be employed as a strategy to attract and sustain support (e.g., grants, contracts, awards, donors, foundations, industry/political leaders)? What role could engagement play in a fund-raising campaign for our institution/academic unit? How might engagement be leveraged to bolster advocacy, volunteerism, and giving from our alumni and friends?
Image and Value Proposition	What is our institution's/academic unit's "public good" value proposition and how do we leverage it for strategic benefit? In what ways does our engagement agenda differentiate us from other institutions/competing units and strengthen our market position? How do we tell this story to prospective students, alumni, and other key stakeholders?

Note: Adapted from "Engagement Champions: How Trustees Connect Campus and Community, Boost Institutional Engagement, and Serve the Public Good," by D. J. Weerts, 2016, *Trusteeship, 24*(4), pp. 18–23.

a team of cabinet-level leaders charged with developing and executing long-term financial strategies for the institution. CEPs can rely on a number of common strategies to facilitate sensemaking, such as convening campus conversations, drafting concept papers, hosting professional development events, creating cross-depart-

mental teams, and importing external ideas that introduce new ways of thinking *(Kezar, 2014; Weick, 1995)*. These vehicles can help campus actors envision new scenarios or patterns of behavior that help the campus achieve its goals for sustainability and revenue growth.

One concrete example of this sensemaking strategy is to convene dialogues about how engagement might enhance an institution or academic unit's competitive position. Table 1 provides a list of questions that could guide these strategic conversations with key campus decision makers. These prompts place engagement within the center of larger questions about campus/academic unit identity, resource opportunities, and overall value proposition. In doing so, they provide campus decision makers with a cognitive pathway to consider how engagement might be leveraged as a central strategy to advance overall institutional or academic unit goals.

Using Data to Facilitate Sensemaking

The aforementioned sensemaking strategy focuses on helping campus decision makers construct new meanings about the strategic value of engagement. A common companion to this normative approach of sensemaking is the data-driven, rational approach referred to as organizational learning *(Kezar, 2014)*. Organizational learning emphasizes the use of data in helping organizational actors detect errors and see better approaches to achieving institutional goals *(Kezar, 2014; Morgan, 2006)*. Since a universal measurement of an academic leader's success is the ability to secure revenue *(Bolman & Gallos, 2011)*, CEPs are wise to use data in ways that illuminate how engagement can improve the institution's core financial position. This strategy can be employed in a range of areas, including retention and completion, enrollment management, grant writing, and advancement and alumni relations.

Retention and completion. A key component of institutional financial health is the ability of the campus to retain its students through graduation. Creating revenue is tied to decreasing student attrition since the cost of recruiting students is higher than the cost of keeping them *(Modo Labs Team, 2018)*. At tuition-dependent private institutions, retention and completion are of paramount importance to the financial health of the enterprise *(Hunter, 2012)*. At public institutions, graduation rates are often tied to performance funding, a policy that is being adopted across states at a rapid pace *(Hillman, 2016)*. For these reasons, institutions must pri-

oritize retention and completion as a core strategy for financial sustainability.

Various leaders have pointed out the importance of creating reports or developing tools to show how engagement contributes to retention and student success *(Holland & Langseth, 2010; Mathias & Banks, 2015)*. These recommendations are founded on a body of work pointing to community-engaged learning as a high-impact practice that contributes to student learning and success in college *(Kuh, 2008)*. Recent studies suggest that community-engaged learning is an especially compelling strategy to retain students of Color *(Maruyama, Furco, & Song, 2018; Song, Furco, Lopez, & Maruyama, 2017)*. Collectively, this body of work illustrates that engagement is well aligned with strategies to improve institutional performance and promote institutional sustainability.

This knowledge places CEPs in a unique position to link the institution's engagement agenda to its broader agenda related to student success and overall institutional performance. In leading from the middle, CEPs can develop creative partnerships and facilitate data use to support these broader goals. As a concrete example, engagement can be linked with the Equity Scorecard developed by Estella Bensimon at the University of Southern California (USC). Institutions involved with this work assemble evidence teams that collect and use data to create equity measures and benchmarks, as well as strategies for improving equity *(Bensimon, 2005)*. Awareness of the positive association between engagement and retaining underrepresented students could enable CEPs to play a significant role in positioning engagement to meet campus equity goals. CEPs can use this connection to make a case for investment in community-engaged learning and help the institution leverage its resources in a way that supports student success and campus financial health.

Student recruitment and enrollment management. As discussed earlier in this article, some colleges and universities are leveraging their engagement identity to position themselves in a crowded market for students. Engagement as a recruitment strategy is founded on the knowledge that the next generation of students seeks greater connection between their academic disciplines and their broader contributions to society. These students are drawn to institutions that offer these opportunities as an essential component of campus life *(Furco, 2010)*. They seek to participate in activities that make contributions to society *(Howe & Strauss, 2000; Furco, 2010)* and " expect their formal education experiences to connect

and have relevance to their lived experiences outside of school" *(Furco, 2010, p. 380).*

CEPs can use this knowledge to help enrollment management professionals make clear linkages between engagement, student experiences, and college recruiting. These connections are emerging in formal plans for student recruitment across the country. For example, the strategic enrollment plan at the University of Hawaii Maui College explicitly links community engagement to the college's mission, vision, and branding strategy. This brand strategy is the basis for recruiting, enrolling, and retaining students at the institution *(University of Hawaii, Maui College, 2017).*

Data that illuminates student expectations about engagement can be particularly informative for academic planning.. For example, the University of Minnesota Office for Public Engagement relies on institutional data from the Student Experience in the Research University (SERU) survey to help academic deans understand the value of engagement through the eyes of their undergraduate students. Using a six-point scale, the SERU survey poses questions such as "Opportunities to connect my academic work with community-based experiences are important to me." Disaggregating these data by college has been valuable in helping collegiate deans place engagement in the broader context of retention and recruitment. For example, 93% of survey respondents within the University of Minnesota–Twin Cities College of Education and Human Development (CEHD) agree that opportunities to connect their academic work with community-based experiences are important. Data such as this make a strong case for prioritizing engagement as a core part of the CEHD curricular planning, retention efforts, and enrollment management strategy moving forward.

Grants and sponsored programs. Another key area where engagement can position an institution for financial success is grant writing. Among research universities, grant acquisition/ expenditures is one of the most common indicators of institutional performance and prestige *(Altbach & Salmi, 2011).* Over the past two decades, societal impact has become an important consideration in the acquisition of grant funding, especially in the sciences. A particularly important development was the creation of the "broader impacts" requirement initiative by the National Science Foundation (NSF) in 1997. This provision required that proposals be evaluated, in part, by assessing their potential to benefit the nation. Since then, scientists have found value in partnering with museums, after-school programs, and other nonprofits with

deep community connections to maximize their grant funds *(Sacco, 2015)*.

Data can be used by CEPs in ways that illuminate the connection between engagement and grant success on their campuses *(Holland & Langseth, 2010)*. For example, the University of Minnesota Office for Public Engagement has worked with the Office of Sponsored Research to track funding proposals that incorporate engagement as a key component. Current institutional data reveal that engagement is incorporated in grant activity totaling $500 million. During fiscal years 2014–2018, 1,525 funding proposals from across the University of Minnesota five-campus system indicated an activity with the community or other outside entity. The requested amount of these proposals totaled more than $1.4 billion. Nearly half (46%) of these publicly engaged research proposals were funded *(Office for Public Engagement, 2017)*.

Elevating engagement as a means to acquire research funding also supports the work of other revenue-focused units that seek to raise the institution's value proposition. This is particularly true in the realm of state relations. A challenge for research university leaders is the growing belief among state officials that faculty are conducting research at the expense of teaching *(Sommerhauser, 2017)*. Studies suggest that few legislators use research emanating from colleges and universities and that many view scholarship as having limited public value. For example, a recent study found that almost three quarters of state legislators choose not to use university research to aid their behavioral health policy decision-making. In interpreting these findings, researchers explained that scholars typically pursue questions of interest to them that differ from those of policymakers and the general public *(Drexel University, 2018)*. Engaged scholarship offers a remedy to counter these disconnections. Departing from traditional research methodologies, engaged scholarship incorporates stakeholder perspectives in formulating research questions, analyzing data, interpreting data, and formulating policies or new practices. High-quality engaged scholarship makes the research more relevant and usable for multiple audiences, including policymakers *(Fitzgerald, Burack, & Seifer, 2010a, 2010b)*. Simply put, engaged scholarship is a strategy for making research more applicable to the interests of legislators and the broader public.

Equipped with this knowledge, CEPs can play a key role in spanning boundaries among research, state relations, and communications divisions to make engaged scholarship visible to legislators and other state decision makers. These partners can work

together to develop messages communicating the innovative nature of engaged scholarship, thereby reshaping understandings about the value of research and research universities more broadly. CEPs who make these connections validate the institution's core research identity while advancing engaged scholarship as a legitimate means of knowledge generation and discovery. These dual purposes reflect both the essentialist and strategic uses of organizational identity *(Stensaker, 2015)* discussed earlier in this article.

Institutional advancement: Fund raising and alumni relations. Sensemaking and organizational learning show particular promise for the broad area of institutional advancement. The field of institutional advancement is largely built on assumptions related to social exchange theory, which suggests that relationships are conceived in economic terms. From this perspective, costs and benefits are weighed to determine whether the relationship should continue *(Chadwick-Jones, 1976)*. Applied to fund raising and alumni relations, it suggests that alums weigh the cost of their philanthropic and service commitments against current or past benefits (e.g., quality of education, career gains, satisfaction with their alma mater). In advancement practice, social exchange theory is largely expressed through relationship marketing *(Drezner, 2011)*, which focuses on creating a positive balance of institutional exchanges with alumni. Class reunions, advisory board membership, special events, and one-on-one cultivation of alumni are practices that aim to tip the balance in a positive direction and gain philanthropic support *(Weerts & Cabrera, 2018)*.

However, emerging evidence disrupts the notion of social exchange theory, or "giving back," as the primary basis for alumni relationships with their alma mater. Over the past decade, studies have found connections among alumni giving, volunteerism, and advocacy and the formation of civic, prosocial behaviors in college. Specifically, these studies indicate that alumni who were active in nonpolitical, volunteer activities in college are those most likely to volunteer on behalf of their alma mater years after graduation (recruit students, host events, etc.). Conversely, alumni who were active in political, nonvolunteer activities in college are those most likely to engage in advocacy behaviors on behalf of their alma mater (e.g., writing to the governor or legislators on behalf of the institution; *Weerts & Cabrera, 2017, 2018)*. In the realm of charitable giving, alumni that were most engaged in these prosocial, civic behaviors during college were also the ones most likely to make gifts to their alma mater years after graduation. Meanwhile, alumni who were civically disengaged as college students were the least likely to give,

volunteer, or advocate on behalf of their alma mater after college *(Weerts & Cabrera, 2017, 2018)*. Overall, this body of work suggests that supportive alumni are those who have formed strong civic, philanthropic commitments and express them in unique ways on behalf of their alma mater. These habits and civic commitments are formed even prior to college and are predictive of postgraduation support for higher education.

An implication of this research is that the field of institutional advancement may be too reliant on social exchange theory or "giving back" as a default explanation for alumni engagement. Practices anchored in this perspective may inadvertently mask the passion of alumni who are motivated to give to their alma mater as a means to express their long-standing civic interests. As Strickland *(2007)* explains, new generations of donors to higher education are largely motivated by their desire to improve society. This position was illustrated in the Portland State and Augsburg University examples discussed earlier in this article.

Evidence from studies such as these could provide CEPs with new sensegiving *(Kezar, 2014)* frames that challenge widely held assumptions about alumni engagement and philanthropy. In particular, this work suggests that advancement leaders may increase commitments of alumni by engaging them as partners in addressing key societal issues that mirror their own civic and philanthropic interests. By reorienting advancement practices in this way, CEPs and advancement professionals could form fruitful collaborations that cultivate alumni to support their alma mater in ways that deeply connect them to societal challenges. Similarly, alumni advocacy and volunteer programs could be redesigned to yield mutual benefits to their alma mater and communities that they serve *(Weerts & Cabrera, 2018)*. An informal network of advancement officers and academic leaders called Citizen Alum has emerged to facilitate creative thinking that connects the civic and philanthropic roles of alumni *(Ellison, 2015)*. This network is an example of a sensemaking vehicle for shifting mind-sets about the value of community engagement as it relates to building successful alumni relations programs.

Assessment Tool: Engagement for Institutional Sustainability

As illustrated throughout this article, institutional revenue generation has several interconnected dimensions that can be strategically connected to engagement. A rubric or institutional assess-

ment tool can be used to illuminate their relationships. Over the past several years, many engagement leaders, scholars, and

Table 2. Assessment Rubric—Engagement for Institutional Sustainability

Use the rubric below to gauge the degree to which engagement is positioned as a core financial strategy for your institution/college/academic unit.

Directions: For each of the six categories (rows), place a circle around the number in the continuum that best represents the *current* status of engagement in positioning your institution/college/unit for financial sustainability.

	Negligible consideration			Emerging consideration			Sustained/robust presence		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Retention and completion *(circle one)*	Community-engaged learning is disconnected from broader institutional/academic unit goals related to retention and completion. Internal dollars supporting these connections are minimal, scarce, and applied inconsistently across the institution/college/unit.			Community-engaged learning is emerging as a key strategy to support retention and completion in this academic unit/institution. Service–learning and other engagement initiatives have modest to adequate levels of funding for these efforts. Engagement remains on the periphery of budget allocation decisions for these purposes.			Community-engaged learning is fully integrated with broader institutional/academic unit strategies to support retention and completion. Support for engagement is aligned with these efforts and applied consistently across the institution/college/unit. Engagement is a budget priority aligned with these purposes.		
Grants and sponsored programs *(circle one)*	Community engagement is rarely or infrequently considered in the context of unit/institutional external grant proposals. Funds emanating from grants rarely apply to advancing community engagement efforts, and may only support a narrow set of traditional outreach activities (e.g., disseminating findings of research). Internal funds are not available to leverage external funds.			Community engagement is occasionally considered in the context of grant proposals within this unit/institution. Grant dollars may support a narrow set of traditional outreach activities, and, in some cases, engaged approaches to teaching, research, and service (e.g., service–learning). Some internal funds are available to leverage external funds.			Community engagement is an integral part of unit/institutional efforts to obtain grants for engaged research, teaching, and student programs. Grants are written to support an innovative set of engagement activities relative to the purposes of the grant (community partnerships, etc.). A robust set of internal funding is used to leverage external funding.		
Institutional advancement (fund raising) *(circle one)*	Community engagement is not a priority in securing gifts from alumni, friends, corporations, or foundations within this institution/unit. Donors are rarely exposed to giving opportunities for engaged work (e.g., not referenced in fund-raising materials/donor conversations).			Community engagement is an emerging priority in advancement for this unit/institution. Engagement receives cursory mention in advancement materials and donor discussions. Support for this work is uneven among advancement staff, and is only discussed within the context of a few projects.			Community engagement is a core component of the institution/unit's advancement strategy. It is a signature feature of fund-raising campaigns and central to case statements regarding gift support for the institution/unit. Major donors are targeted to make large endowment gifts to support engaged research, teaching, and service.		

	Negligible consideration			Emerging consideration			Sustained/robust presence		
Institutional advancement (alumni relations) *(circle one)*	Community engagement is rarely considered in alumni relations programming within this institution/academic unit. Alumni volunteer and advocacy opportunities have limited connection to broader community or societal goals. Few connections are made between alumni volunteerism, advocacy, and fund-raising efforts to support engagement as a core institutional practice.			Community engagement as an alumni relations strategy is emerging. Programs such as "alumni service day" provide occasional opportunities for alumni to connect their civic interests to the civic missions of the institution/academic unit. Engagement remains on the periphery of alumni volunteer and advocacy opportunities. The connection between these programs and fund-raising efforts to promote engagement as a core practice is emerging.			Community engagement is fully integrated into alumni programming within this institution/academic unit. Alumni are given opportunities to connect their civic interests in ways that benefit their alma mater and the broader society. Clear connections are made between alumni volunteerism, advocacy, and fund-raising efforts to support engagement as a core institutional practice.		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Recruitment and enrollment management *(circle one)*	Community engagement is rarely considered in recruitment or enrollment management strategy for this institution/unit. Materials, tours, and other recruitment methods rarely highlight engaged work among students, faculty, and staff within this institution/unit. Future students are unaware of this institution/unit's commitment to engagement.			Community engagement is emerging as a recruitment and enrollment management strategy for this institution/unit. Materials, tours, and other recruitment methods occasionally feature engagement work among students, faculty, and staff within this institution/unit. Future students may or may not be aware of this institution/academic unit's commitment to engagement.			Community engagement is an integral part of the institution/unit's recruitment and enrollment management strategy. Materials, tours, and other recruitment methods prominently highlight engaged work among students, faculty, and staff within this institution/unit. Future students are fully aware of this institution/academic unit's commitment to engagement.		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Marketing and communications *(circle one)*	Community engagement is rarely considered in the context of marketing and communications for this institution/academic unit. There is limited consideration about how engagement contributes to the institutional/unit brand. Social media, marketing materials, and general communications infrequently highlight engagement as part of the institution/unit's core identity.			Community engagement is beginning to be considered in relation to marketing and communications within this college/unit. Staff increasingly strategize how engagement contributes to the institutional/collegiate brand. Social media, marketing materials, and other communications are beginning to highlight engagement as part of the institution/unit's core identity.			Community engagement is an integral part of the institution/academic unit's marketing, communications, and branding strategy. Engagement is prominently featured in social media, marketing materials, and general communications. Engagement is embedded in messages to internal and external audiences about the values and core identity of the unit/institution.		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

professional associations have created assessment tools to support institutionalization of engagement across colleges and universities. These rubrics can serve both to benchmark progress toward engagement and help leaders envision a sequence of steps in the transformation into an engaged institution (see *Campus Compact, 2008; Committee on Institutional Cooperation, 2005; Furco, 2003; Furco, Weerts, Burton, & Kent, 2009; Holland, 1997*). Although some of these tools include financial support as one measure of progress, no tool exclusively assesses the extent to which engagement is positioned to support larger goals of institutional sustainability. A contribution of this article is to provide such a tool for CEPs as they facilitate sensemaking and organizational learning within their institutions.

Modeled from a similar assessment tool in the field (see *Furco et al., 2009*), Table 2 provides a rubric for campus leaders to assess the status of engagement in positioning an institution/academic unit for financial sustainability. The key dimensions of sustainability and resource generation relate to the primary areas of this article: retention and college completion, grants and sponsored programs, institutional advancement (fund raising/alumni relations), recruitment/enrollment management, and marketing and communications. The goal of this rubric is to stimulate discussion about an institution/academic unit's strategic use of engagement as it relates to financial sustainability. As with other scorecards or tools, it aims to help campus actors see new opportunities and consider innovative means for achieving institutional goals (see *Bensimon, 2005*). Toward these ends, the rubric could serve as a companion piece with other sensemaking vehicles to facilitate learning and institutional change.

Conclusion

The primary goal of this article is to provide CEPs with a conceptual map and set of tools to position engagement within broader campus discussions related to institutional sustainability and revenue generation. The intended contribution of this piece is to place engagement with "the big-picture vision of the institution" *(McReynolds & Shields, 2015, p. 22)* rather than focusing on financial support for center-directed engagement programs and partnerships. This broader focus stems from research illustrating that innovations (engagement in this case) become part of an organization's core identity when they are diffused throughout an organization rather than enclaved into a standalone unit such as an office or center *(Levine, 1980; Sandmann & Weerts, 2008)*. Thus, if a primary goal among CEPs is to institutionalize or diffuse engagement prac-

tice throughout their institutions, revenue-generation strategies must be connected to the viability of academic units across the campus and for the institution as a whole. This approach prioritizes the creation of engaged institutions rather than maintaining institutions that house engagement programs (engagement as an institutionalized practice rather than an enclaved practice).

This article has articulated some unique challenges and opportunities for CEPs as they lead from the middle of their organizations. In particular, CEPs face difficult challenges in leading engagement in periods of financial uncertainty. As state support for higher education declines as a proportion of revenue and scrutiny of college costs increases, engagement-related programs will remain under pressure in budgetary discussions. As discussed in this article, CEPs can use social cognition strategies to help campus decisionmakers make sense of engagement as a means to address ongoing financial challenges. In undertaking these important roles, CEPs can begin to see the "joys and opportunities of life in the middle" *(Bolman & Gallos, 2011, p. 143)*. In particular, these professionals can gain satisfaction from facilitating win–win agreements, contributing to institutional sustainability, and transforming their institutions to become engaged colleges and universities. CEPs can have a profound impact in meeting the needs of their students and institutions, advancing the field of higher education, and serving the interests of their communities and the broader society.

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About the Author

David J. Weerts is associate professor of higher education in the Department of Organizational Leadership, Policy, and Development at the University of Minnesota–Twin Cities, where he also serves as faculty director in the Office for Public Engagement. His research focuses on state–university relations, community engagement, and institutional advancement. He received his Ph.D. in higher education from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Developing Communication Repertoires to Address Conflict in Community Engagement Work

Emily M. Janke and Rebecca Dumlao

Abstract

Due to their work engaging with diverse people representing varied institutions and community settings and addressing diverse issues and topics, community engagement professionals (CEPs) must serve as boundary spanners *(Child & Faulkner, 1998; Janke, 2009)* across differences. Quite often, interpersonal, organizational, cultural, and other differences lead to tensions and conflict. Though CEPs enter into positions and situations in which conflict exists, or is likely to exist, few have been professionally prepared to manage interpersonal conflict. Drawing on a competence-based approach to communicating about interpersonal conflict *(Cupach, Canary, & Spitzberg, 2010)*, this essay suggests key communication capacities, including motivation, knowledge, and skills to manage conflict, even positively transforming conflict in ways that build understanding and relationships. Conflict management is not about learning a single model or a specific script to "end all conflicts." Instead, conflict management involves developing competency with constructive practices through intentional, sustained effort. *Keywords:* Conflict, Communication, Competency, Community Engagement, Community Engagement Professional

> "Truly, we do not have the option of staying out of conflict unless we stay out of relationships, families, work, and community. Conflict happens—so we had best be prepared for it." *(Hocker & Wilmot, 2014, p. 8)*

Introduction

Due to their work engaging with diverse people representing varied institutions and community settings, community engagement professionals (CEPs) must regularly "do" boundary spanning across differences. Quite often, boundary spanning across differences (whether interpersonal, organizational, cultural, or from another source) leads CEPs to be involved in interpersonal tensions and even overt conflict. CEPs may experience tensions and conflict directly, or they may support, mediate,

or facilitate faculty, staff, students, and community partners experiencing conflict.

Indeed, in their chapter "High-Quality Community–Campus Partnerships: Approaches and Competencies," Martin and Crossland *(2017)* name *conflict resolution* as a key skill for community engagement professionals (CEPs). Those authors describe the importance of CEPs in navigating individual, organizational, and institutional differences in ways that share power and solve problems. Few authors have addressed conflict competency in the field of community engagement *(Martin & Crossland, 2017)*. Still, our practitioner-scholarship (see *Dumlao, 2018 and Reimer et al., 2015*) demonstrates the role of interpersonal communication in addressing conflict competently and with confidence.

Interpersonal conflict is just one form of conflict. Others types include *intrapersonal* conflict, wherein one struggles with one's own emotions and thoughts; *structural* conflict, wherein external forces and constraints such as limited resources, positionality, or organizational changes create tensions among people or groups; and *social* conflicts such as social movements, international and transnational disputes, and political diplomacy. This reflective essay presents scholarship from the interdisciplinary fields of communication and peace studies to refine the definition of, and our approach to, interpersonal conflict only. Each of these fields focuses on communication as a way to transform conflict by working through differences to build better, stronger relationships. We focus on interpersonal conflict because interactions occur at the individual level, regardless of whether one is representing oneself, a group, or an organization. Further, these are the types of conflicts that CEPs likely face most frequently and would benefit most from learning to navigate competently and with confidence.

Links between interpersonal communication and conflict resolution cannot be overstated. Dumlao *(2018)* says people use communication to express struggles, to describe details from a particular perspective, to learn from one another, to generate workable responses, and to cocreate change *(pp. 118–119)*. Hocker and Wilmot *(2014)* point out that communication behavior often creates conflict, reflects conflict, and, importantly, is the vehicle for productive or destructive management of conflict *(p. 14)*. Matyók and Kellett *(2017)* say communication is "the primary praxis of nonviolent conflict transformation and peacebuilding" *(p. xi)*. Scholars from peace and conflict studies and communication use the term conflict *management*, rather than conflict *resolution*, to describe the many ways that people deal with conflict. The term *conflict*

management recognizes that not all conflict is to be eliminated, as some types of conflict are necessary and productive (as described more fully later in the essay).

John Paul Lederach *(2014)* argues for the use of the term *conflict transformation* as an alternative way of thinking about and designing practices for peace. Whereas *conflict management* and *conflict resolution* are two terms that describe efforts to reduce, eliminate, or terminate conflict *(Reimer et al., 2015)*, Lederach would challenge CEPs engaged in conflict to focus not on simply resolving conflict to the satisfaction of the parties involved, but to build relationships and collectively imagine a desired future that might be different from the past in which the conflict emerged. This approach implies radical shifts in how individuals value each other, as well as in the structures required to support efforts to achieve the future desired by the community.

Conflict transformation aligns with and builds on John Galtung's *(1996)* conceptions of and distinctions between *negative peace* and *positive peace*. Negative peace describes the absence or cessation of violence, whereas positive peace describes the presence of nurturing relationships, the creation of social systems and structures that address the needs of individuals and communities, and the constructive resolution—and transformation—of conflict. For these reasons, we use, and recommend, the terms *conflict management* and *conflict transformation*, rather than *conflict resolution*, to describe the set of competencies needed by CEPs.

Thus CEPs must develop a repertoire of communication capacities, including knowledge areas and practiced skills, to draw upon to solve problems and manage conflict capably. Conflict management is not about learning a single model or a specific script to "end all conflicts." Instead, conflict management involves developing competency with constructive practices through intentional, sustained effort.

Everybody has experience with interpersonal conflict and has informally learned conflict management techniques through their own experience and by watching others. However, few have taken the time to thoughtfully examine their approaches, or have benefited from a more studied approach to understanding the array of approaches one might take and the effects that each approach might have. Based on a review of scholarship, including our own *(Dumlao, 2018; Reimer et al., 2015)*, we present a *communication competency* approach and suggest several frameworks and models that could provide a basis for CEP professional development. These

approaches, drawn from across the disciplines of peace and conflict studies and communication, can help to develop CEPs' communication repertoires and grow their competencies in conflict management. Finally, we offer some practical tools and strategies for CEPs to consider, explore, and adopt.

Interpersonal Communication and Conflict

Conflict has been defined many ways, but one commonly accepted definition is an "expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who *perceive* [emphasis added] incompatible goals, scarce resources, and interference from others in achieving goals" *(Hocker & Wilmot, 2014, p. 13)*. Conflict is frequently described as a perception and as an experience: One knows that one is in conflict because one feels that one is "in conflict" *(p. 8)* and one experiences dis-ease, a feeling that something is not right. When people work together, each brings his or her own perspective, including his or her perceptions, into interactions. As they talk, each person involved must interpret incoming verbal and nonverbal communication. Listeners rely on their individual and cultural histories, learned priorities, and any existing frame of reference about the other person and similar situations to make sense of what they see and hear.

Conflict, at its core, is about how people perceive each other and the situation. That is, conflict occurs because individuals have different ideas about how things "should be," reflecting their own values, beliefs, and attitudes. Further, because conflict emerges as a result of natural and inherent differences among individuals, conflict itself is very normal. Many human development and change management specialists say conflict is needed to transform individuals or circumstances for something new to develop. Shantz *(1987)* states, "Conflict is a central concept in virtually every major theory of human development" *(p. 283)*.

So, if we situate conflict as normative rather than abnormal, learning to manage or transform conflicts positively is an essential capability that can be developed and refined. Conflict cannot, and should not, necessarily always be avoided. Some of the benefits of conflict managed well include (a) bringing problems to the table to be addressed (rather than having struggles occur without acknowledgment or attention), (b) helping people join together and clarify goals, and (c) clearing out resentments or misunderstandings so people understand each other better (see *Hocker & Wilmot, 2014, pp. 46–47*). Further, managing conflict and transforming it effectively

can help avoid abusive tactics such as verbal or physical aggression, since those tactics may no longer be considered necessary ways to achieve change *(Cupach, Canary, & Spitzberg, 2010, p. 6)*. Also, learning to manage conflict competently can reduce risks to one's psychological and physical health *(Cupach et al., 2010, p. 6)*, as well as offering alternative ways of seeing a tough problem *(p. 5)*. Finally, conflict managed constructively can help build long-term satisfying relationships *(Hocker & Wilmot, 2014, p. 8)*, such as those highly important to community engagement work. Constructive approaches are more likely to yield durable solutions *(Cupach et al., 2010, p. 5)*. And, when managed well, conflict can lead to increased integration and cohesion among group members, as well as increased trust, motivation, group performance, and productivity *(Katz, Lawyer, & Sweedler, 2011, p. 83)*.

Conflict happens in the context of other background factors, such as individual differences related to attachment styles, argumentativeness, taking conflict personally, locus of control, and sex/gender differences (see *Cupach et al., 2010*). For example, "argumentative individuals may show more competitiveness during conflict. Individuals who are shy may tend to avoid conflict more often" *(p. 31)*. Background influences are shaped by predisposed and learned tendencies, which, in turn, influence how we think about and approach conflict *(Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012)*.

Although a number of background factors shape conflict, Ting-Toomey and Chung *(2012)* describe the importance of culture in one's attitude toward conflict. They share that individuals tend to have a "positive or negative attitude toward other groups [which] is acquired through our cultural socializations, family socialization, and personal life experiences" *(pp. 42–43)*. Applied to conflict, different cultures have different value patterns, such as individualism and collectivism, and these shape conflict attitudes, expectations, and behaviors *(p. 181)*. For example, cultures may view conflict differently with regard to (1) focusing on relationship versus content, (2) win-win or win-lose approach, (3) fixing something tangible versus repairing the relationship, and (4) seeing resolution as an outcome rather than an ongoing relational process (for more, see *Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012*). In these ways, one's dispositions and attitudes toward conflict may be shaped by one's culture.

Lulofs and Cahn *(2000)* share the significance of attitudes:

> How people think and feel about conflict affects the way they make choices in conflict situations. If one approaches conflict as a problem to be solved or an

> opportunity to persuade, more constructive choices are likely than if one views conflict as something to be feared. *(pp. 13–14)*

Destructive conflict, they point out, "is characterized by a tendency to expand and escalate the conflict to the point where it often becomes separated from the initial cause and takes on a life of its own" *(p. 14)*. Destructive conflict can provoke retaliation. In instances where one "wins" and the other "loses," the losing party may not remain committed to the agreed-upon arrangement or outcome. The "loser" may feel the need to reclaim position or status, correcting any implied inequities. Further, the conflict can fester emotionally because parties become entrenched in their own positions about the issues *(pp. 14–15)*. In community engagement work, destructive conflict practices can derail possibilities for positive community-based changes. Destructive practices may stem, for example, from fear of loss, whether it is loss of reputation, opportunity, resources, or something else. Simply the concern or perception that conflict could or will emerge can prevent someone from even attempting to engage with another person or group. Effective communication and constructive conflict management, on the other hand, can help promote conflict transformations, or "ah-ha moments in which the lightbulb goes on and illuminates a situation in an entirely different way" *(Putnam, 2010, p. 325)*. Developing greater competence in managing conflict communication can have far-reaching possibilities and consequences for partnerships and for communities.

A New View: Competence in Communication About Conflict

Cupach et al. *(2010)* have developed a competence-based approach to interpersonal conflict based on their model of communication competence *(Spitzberg, Canary, & Cupach, 1994)*. Communication competence, they say, involves individual judgments regarding both the *effectiveness* and the *appropriateness* of communication *(Cupach et al., 2010, p. 20)*. Effectiveness involves the extent to which communicators achieve their resource, relational, or presentation goals, even though those goals vary in how much they matter in a particular context *(p. 23)*. Appropriateness, on the other hand, has to do with how well communicators account for the social/cultural or interpersonal expectations of others *(p. 27)*. A competent interpersonal communicator would tend to be both effective and appropriate in a given situation.

Notably, judgments about the effectiveness and appropriateness of communication are not absolute; they cannot be described as simply present or absent *(Cupach et al., 2010, p. 29)*. Instead, competence evaluations represent an overall impression of a person's appropriateness and effectiveness in a particular interaction *(p. 29)*. Even so, perceptions of competence matter; they create positive or negative impacts on relational partners *(p. 21)*. Perceptions of competence also become part of the relational history between those partners and influence the future choices they make as they communicate with each other (see *Lulofs & Cahn, 2000, pp. 13–17*).

The competence-based approach identifies three critical factors that can help a CEP be seen as, and likely feel, more competent in conflict: motivation, knowledge, and skills. Development of all three factors helps to increase the likelihood that one will be consistently competent in managing conflict *(Cupach et al., 2010)*. *Motivation* involves making the choice to be effective and appropriate in conflicts. For instance, a CEP must show a willingness to engage productively in moments when conflict arises. *Knowledge* involves identifying one's own goals and being aware of relevant social and relational rules *(Spitzberg et al., 1994, p. 31)*. Knowledge also involves understanding conflicts in general, or discerning what verbal or nonverbal behaviors would likely lead toward specific conflict consequences *(p. 31)*. To navigate conflict, CEPs must have a developed understanding of conflict that includes such aspects as why it exists, where it comes from, how it is manifest, and its role in relationships and community building. Finally, *skills* involve performing verbal and nonverbal communication behaviors, thereby enacting knowledge and motivation through specific moves during conflict *(p. 32)*. For instance, CEPs must develop the skill of being adaptable in how they communicate with others, appropriately tailoring communication to the person and situation. Certainly CEPs must build communication competency, "develop[ing] a diverse pool of communication strategies and tactics to draw from" *(p. 32)*, and be able to choose among them to fit the people involved as well as the context. See Table 1 for an overview of the key conflict communication competency development areas for CEPs described more fully in the sections below.

Table 1. Conflict Communication Competency Development Areas for Community Engagement Professionals (CEPs)

Areas for CEP conflict communication competency development	Why this competency area matters	Professional development tools	Community engagement example
Motivation— A desire and the sense of one's ability to be appropriate and effective	CEPs must engage in and through conflict to do their community engagement work effectively and positively.	Conflict paradigm that posits that conflict can be productive Conflict transformation goals Desire to create positive outcomes	A CEP feels that one can and will engage with a partner on a difficult topic and will be appropriate and effective in identifying and achieving the goals of each partner.
Knowledge— Awareness and understanding about one's own and others' different approaches to conflict	CEPs must be aware of and build a base of concepts that inform how conflict can work constructively. CEPs must develop self-knowledge and understand one's role in conflict.	Thomas-Kilmann Instrument Dialectical tensions	A CEP understands that one has a different approach to engaging with a partner about a difficult topic and that this different approach is causing tension.

Table continues on next page.

Skills— Practiced abilities to draw from diverse strategies in conflict situations	CEPs must develop a repertoire of verbal and nonverbal behaviors to manage and transform conflict.	Adaptability/ Flexibility in choosing approaches Presenting and sharing information Reflective listening Appreciative inquiry Nonviolent communication Supportive communication Learning conversations Listening skills Restorative practices Circle processes	A CEP tries a different way of communicating based on one's observation of the conflict because one sees a reaction from one's partner that was not what one expected or hoped for.

Motivation

Community engagement professionals enter into positions and situations in which interpersonal conflict exists, or is likely to exist, even though few entered into their positions to be conflict workers per se. Instead, CEPs tend to see themselves as community organizers, community builders, and even peacebuilders (see, for example, *Avila, Knoerr, Orlando, & Castello, 2010; Boyte, 2009; Reimer et al., 2015*). In fact, many people are averse to conflict and seek to avoid it in most situations *(Kilmann & Thomas, 1977; Thomas & Kilmann, 1974)*. They may see conflict as a sign that something is wrong—and that someone is to blame for creating the conflict in the first place. "Who started it?" is a common question parents ask children who are fighting, for instance, with the intent to understand the cause of the troubles. In a professional setting, such as when a CEP is working on behalf of an institution to develop or maintain community partnerships, moments of communication gone awry, or disagreement, can even be seen as indicating that the CEP is "bad" at his or her job.

However, people and human communities are at the center of community engagement, and conflict often happens when differences intersect. Again, it is important to remember that conflict is not just about fighting, but can be experienced when individuals or groups *perceive* incompatible goals, scarce resources, or inter-

ference from others in achieving their goals. CEPs advocate for and situate themselves in boundary-spanning roles and spaces, placing them in the middle of dilemmas; power imbalances; and historical, current, and systemic injustices. In this way, conflict can and will be present. CEPs have encountered numerous examples of interpersonal conflict: hearing neighbors express anger about the noise level of students living in their neighborhoods; hearing community partners express impatience with students' tardiness at service-learning sites; receiving e-mails from parents expressing concern about a service-learning site; hearing students express frustration about the level or type of supervision received at their service-learning sites; and listening to faculty express concern that their colleagues do not recognize the scholarly contributions of their engaged work.

   Spotlight CEP motivation areas. A critical dimension of CEP competency development for managing and transforming conflict must focus on how CEPs think about and approach those moments when one person faces opposition to someone else in ways that seem incompatible or uncomfortable and thus make them feel disrespected or unvalued. The motivation to engage, not just as a community builder or as a peacebuilder, places CEPs in the role of a conflict worker as well. In this way, motivation is a psychological aspect that resides within the CEP and is shaped by whether that person (a) believes that she or he has the *ability* to identify and implement an approach that is likely to produce positive results and be effective and (b) believes that the approach used *will result* in positive outcomes in the particular situation or circumstance and be appropriate *(Cupach et al., 2010)*. For example, a CEP may take a new position at a university that has negative relations with many residents in the neighborhood adjoining campus. The disputes largely stem from the university's purchase and development of property to build student housing. Many residents have publicly protested the development and have spoken harshly to university members on various occasions. The new CEP would like to establish mutually beneficial and reciprocal partnerships and projects for students and residents in the neighborhood. If one wishes to pursue this goal for community engagement, the CEP must have confidence in their ability to navigate the necessary relationships effectively, and they must believe that their efforts will be received by the residents in a way that makes them effective. More than likely, a lot of listening to the deeper issues and the concerns of those involved will be needed as a first step!

Knowledge

Feeling motivated to engage with people and in situations that are likely to involve conflict is tied to developing a knowledge base about oneself in relation to others, as well as about different levels and types of conflict. Essential conflict knowledge (and related scholarship) also includes, but is not limited to, social, structural, ethnic, identity-based, environmental, and organizational factors that can shape conflicts. For example, interpersonal conflict is shaped by social contexts in which individuals and groups experience conflict based on competing interests, different identities, and differing attitudes *(Schellenberg, cited in Reimer et al., 2015, p. 5)*. Interpersonal conflict can also be shaped by the way that organizations and governments are structured (i.e., organizational contexts), which guide and constrain individual perceptions and behaviors. For instance, power bases in an organization help determine resources that flow down to individuals, like CEPs, to do community-engaged work. By drawing from scholarship in peace and conflict studies, communication, and other fields, CEPs can better understand why conflict occurs in different contexts, which in turn will help them identify strategies that best serve their goals and the goals of their partners.

Given our understandings of conflict and community engagement work, we believe that several knowledge areas are most relevant to CEPs. Arguably, rigorous professional development would include the development of a CEP's knowledge about (a) personal approaches and responses to conflict (to include the CEP's own and that of others), (b) cultural differences related to conflict, and (c) how organizational or structural contexts can create and perpetuate conflict between individuals and among groups.

Spotlight CEP knowledge areas. Understanding personal preferences related to conflict is a critical first step toward being able to effectively identify and address tensions, so we spotlight several tools to help build CEPs' knowledge about interpersonal conflict. For instance, one commonly used tool for examining personal styles in conflict is the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI). The TKI is an assessment that helps individuals better understand how they tend to respond when their needs differ from others' (i.e., are in conflict). This tool classifies styles into five categories (accommodating, avoiding, compromising, controlling, collaborative) that fall within two axes: concern for relationships and concern for personal goals. With an orientation classified according to the five categories, a person can examine ways that orientation tends to interact with other conflict styles and can con-

sider the benefits and drawbacks of each style in interactions. An individual's preferred conflict style may change depending on the situation. For example, someone who is conflict avoidant with their parents may be more collaborative with work colleagues. Further, one can intentionally adjust one's style to create a different interaction and, ultimately, a different outcome. For example, someone who has been conflict avoidant with his or her parents historically, or about specific issues, may choose to act in more collaborative ways, trying out proactive strategies that can help both sides come to a satisfactory outcome.

We have used the TKI and related tools to facilitate learning about teamwork and collaboration, as well as to facilitate discussions with those experiencing conflict. For example, many of us like to imagine that we are collaborative in our approaches to conflict—that we are proactive and cooperative, working with others to find solutions that satisfy the concerns of all involved. However, using the TKI, a CEP could learn that he or she tends to be conflict avoidant—tending to be passive, acting in uncooperative ways that neither help achieve goals nor address the concerns of the partner. Recognizing different personal approaches to conflict, including one's own, can help a CEP identify what might or might not be effective when working with others, enabling the CEP to promote constructive, rather than destructive, conflict. Though one cannot force another party to engage, or to change how they engage in conflict, becoming knowledgeable about options for different situations can help the CEP understand how best to work with the person "where they are."

In addition to the TKI, we contend that awareness about *dialectical tensions* in relationships is an essential component of building a strong knowledge base for CEPs. The term *dialectics* refers to inherent continuums of tension that individuals must navigate in relationships (Sabourin, 2003), such as those common to all partnerships: openness versus closedness, novelty versus predictability, and interdependence versus autonomy. For example, a faculty member may be working to develop a community engagement project with a school principal as part of a service-learning course. The faculty member shares very little information with the school principal about her plans for engaging the elementary students. She tends not to disclose very much information, assuming a "need to know" stance because she is aware that the principal is very busy. However, the principal may be very interested in learning about service-learning and wish to be more deeply engaged in the partnership and project. The principal may feel exploited and frus-

trated. The principal could begin to detach, relationally and practically, from the project. The faculty member, meanwhile, may be unaware of the principal's response. In this instance, it is important that the two have a learning conversation about preferences for how they want to be treated. In this instance, they are experiencing tensions between interdependence and autonomy, and also perhaps between openness and closedness. Tensions like these, resulting from interpersonal or organizational sources, can be experienced in community–university partnerships, yet can also be managed effectively through learning conversations *(Dumlao & Janke, 2012)*. Awareness of such dialectical tensions is an important component of being able to address tensions effectively. For instance, we might want to learn how the partner wants to be treated, recognizing that this may be different from the way we want to be treated ourselves. Thus, one communication strategy or skill for CEPs to develop would be ways of holding learning conversations to support relationships and growth in community–higher education partnerships (see *Stone, Patton, & Heen, 2010*).

We all have characteristic ways of communicating, with aspects that include verbal, nonverbal, and even listening style. Our habitual ways of communicating may blind us to how we are communicating, and we may not realize how others are interpreting what we do and say or even how we are listening. For example, listening styles may be relational, analytical, task oriented, or critical thinking (see Table 2 for more description of listening styles). A faculty member may listen to a community partner speak using a task-oriented approach—focused on identifying a service-learning project for his students. Throughout their conversation, the faculty member would be focused on setting up specific activities and schedules for students' work at the community partner site. The community partner, however, might listen to the faculty member using a relational approach. He would be gauging how the relationship will work and might be starting to feel concerned that his ideas and needs will be ignored. He might be less concerned with the tasks and more concerned with figuring out whether the faculty member will be a good partner for him and his organization. Knowledge about different approaches to listening, learning about preferences in how others want to be heard, understanding how these differences in listening contribute to interpersonal communication and conflict, and being able to adapt as appropriate—all these are important for carrying on conversations that help constructively manage a conflict.

Table 2. Listening Styles Chart

Listening styles are habitual ways or individual preferences to receive and process incoming information. Use this chart to define where you are as a partner now and to identify what might help the partnership work better!

Style Name	Key Characteristics	Strengths	Limitations	Suggestions
Relational	Individual tends to focus on understanding the emotions of others. Wants to connect with the other and have them "feel understood."	Very oriented toward relationship building and using emotional intelligence. Useful in promoting the partnership, especially during stress.	Could be over-focused on the relationship and miss other kinds of incoming information.	Watch for contexts and situations that might need more "content" information. Learn to use other styles when beneficial to partners or the work.
Analytical	Individual tends to withhold judgment and consider all sides of an issue or all aspects of a person's perspective. Wants the "whole message."	Very in-depth approach. Useful to identify multiple perspectives/contexts that could affect the partnership.	Could be so focused on the big picture of a conversation and miss important, "minor" details.	Watch for a particular set of details or message elements that are critical to the partner OR the partnership in the current situation.
Task-focused	Individual tends to see a listening transaction as a "task" to be completed. Wants to stay focused and "on topic."	Very goal-oriented. Useful to move partnership goals forward.	Could be overfocused on getting listening done and miss partnership information.	Watch for ways to stay involved with listening to the other and more fully connected to them, not just to the content being shared.
Critical listening	Individual tends to watch for accuracy and consistency when listening to others.	Very logic-oriented. Could help identify areas of concern that partners may need to address.	Could be so focused on accuracy that makes the other partner not want to talk.	Watch for ways to listen without judgments to what matters to the partner both in terms of content and the relationship.

Author's note: This chart was developed by me based on listening styles and characteristics found in Bodie, Worthington, and Gearhart *(2013)*. The strengths, limitations, and suggestions are mine. (See also *Watson, Barker, & Weaver, 1995*.) From *A Guide to*

A third, and critically important, area of competence development for CEPs is knowledge about how conflict can be perceived and expressed across cultures. For example, Darla Deardorff has developed approaches and workbooks on intercultural competence, "the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's own intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes" *(Deardorff, 2004 as cited in Deardorff 2006, p. 192,).* Stella Ting-Toomey *(2005)* argues that scholars and practitioners need to develop culturally sensitive knowledge, mindfulness, and skills to be adaptable and flexible in a given conflict situation.

An important aspect of knowing is not knowing, or knowing what you do not know. This is true for cultural competence, as well as for effectively managing and transforming interpersonal conflict more generally. Therefore, an important intellectual practice is to "hold lightly" the assumptions one makes and the "stories" that one holds about an interaction, person, or situation while continuing to collect evidence about the motivations or goals of the conflicting party *(Shockley-Zalabak, 2015).* This is important in all conflict, but especially in situations in which cultural differences may be present because, as Ting-Toomey *(2010)* points out, intercultural conflict "often starts out with diverse expectations concerning what constitutes appropriate and inappropriate verbal and nonverbal behaviors in a conflict encounter scene. Violations of expectations, in turn, often solidify the attributional bias and subsequent communication responses that individuals use" through the course of the conflict *(p. 143).* Scholars have begun to integrate intercultural competence training into community engagement scholarship and professional development practices, and it is indeed crucial to understand the way cultures interact with conflict specifically.

Ultimately, CEPs who have established competency in communication about conflict will have useful information to craft an approach or response to conflict. Such information might include awareness about one's own goals for the relationship or situation, as well as relevant cultural, organizational, or other contextual factors that shape how conflict is perceived and performed.

Skills

The use of effective conflict management skills can help turn stressful and difficult situations into "experiences of openness and

clarity where mutual goals are served and relationships enhanced" *(Katz, Lawyer, & Sweedler, 2011, p. ix)*. For the field of community engagement to progress in bringing community members together and fostering meaningful change, practitioners need to develop a repertoire of communication skills, such as listening to one's own thoughts and feelings, listening to the thoughts and feelings of others, and the ability and confidence to call upon a set of strategies that are appropriate and effective in meeting the goals of the people in conflict. Committing to "interior work" is a key foundational skill and practice of successfully managing interpersonal conflicts, as we often think of what we need to say to someone else and skip over the first and more important step of what we have to understand for and about ourselves. Therefore, conflict management skill development focuses on skills to clarify one's own feelings, thoughts, and goals, as well as skills to clarify understanding and appropriate and effective interactions with others.

Spotlight CEP skills. A key characteristic of a skilled practitioner is having a repertoire of multiple complex communication skills. Key skills include presenting and sharing information clearly *(McCornack, 2016)*, reflective listening *(Katz et al., 2011)*, appreciative inquiry *(Cooperrider, Whitney, & Starvos, 2008)*, collaborative problem solving, principled negotiation *(Fisher, Ury, & Patton, 2011)*, nonviolent communication *(Rosenberg, 2015)*, supportive communication practices and listening styles *(Dumlao, 2018)*, restorative practices and restorative justice *(Zehr, 2002)*, receiving and sharing feedback *(Stone & Heen, 2014)*, circle processes *(Pranis, 2005)*, and, perhaps most important, appropriate skill selection and flexibility among the different possibilities. Many activities, handbooks, workshops, and programs, rooted in scholarship and developed through the authors' practical experience, are available to guide development of these various skills. Such skills are valuable not only for conflicts that CEPs are directly involved in (as a conflict partner), but also when acting in a third-party role as a coach, facilitator, or mediator. With each of these skills, guidelines are available for ways to speak and interact with others, to build understanding and empathy, and to foster stronger relationships.

Common across many of the skills presented here are several communication practices that build understanding and relationships as a way to help conflict partners achieve goals *(Dumlao, 2018)*. These include (a) describing a situation by carefully choosing words that avoid judgment of the person or the situation; (b) taking a "we" stance in order to work together initially to identify the root problems and potential solutions while also recognizing that each of us

has "me" interests, perspectives, and expertise; (c) describing interests (i.e., what is wanted or needed) rather than taking positions (i.e., taking an inflexible stance); (d) seeking to understand the other person's needs and wants (empathy); and (e) being willing to learn and explore new possibilities for behavior, attitudes, and ideas rather than staying fixed in a single mind-set or way of behaving.

Introducing new structures for "scripting" communication, particularly when someone is experiencing conflict, can be powerful. For example, we have each used collaborative frameworks in our teaching that include helpful sentence starters (e.g., "When I observe (see, hear, remember, imagine) . . . I feel (anxious, worried, excited)." Students then practice new "scripts," choosing their words differently based on a mutuality perspective. Giving students and others practice in managing conflict when not "in the heat" of a conflict can be a dynamic way to build new skills and capabilities.

Two recent books were written by the authors to support community engagement professionals as they work to manage and transform conflict. Scholarship and approaches presented in *A Guide to Collaborative Communication for Service-Learning and Community Engagement Partners (Dumlao, 2018)* and *Transformative Change: An Introduction to Peace and Conflict Studies (Reimer et al., 2015)*, for instance, could serve as a starting point for further scholarship and professional development for CEPs as they develop their repertoires and grow their competency in conflict management. The skills that we present here have been chosen for their practicality, as well as for their relevance to community engagement partnerships. For brevity's sake, we have listed common practices drawn from the fields of communication and peace and conflict studies, but we encourage others to bring additional strategies to this work from other disciplines and fields.

In this essay, we have focused mainly on developing interpersonal conflict management and conflict transformation tools so that we can manage conflict on our own. Sometimes, however, we need help from someone who is outside or apart from the conflict. For example, a CEP may be in a situation where things are really tense, and one's conflict management strategies seem not to be working. It is possible that despite one's efforts, destructive conflict continues, and perhaps even escalates. Sometimes the people on opposite sides of a difference may be well intentioned, but things may not be headed in a constructive direction because of a need for change in a structure. That is, external forces create circumstances in which conflict emerges and persists. Hence, conflict may not always be based solely in the people involved; rather, it may reflect

external factors that must be addressed. Sometimes both personal and external factors may be involved. The best next step to address the conflict might be to engage someone who can provide a different perspective, playing a third-party role, such as a colleague who can coach the parties involved or help to mediate the conflict. Though third-party mediation is beyond the scope of this essay, we recommend that future articles and studies address third-party approaches to conflict management in community engagement, including coaching, facilitation, mediation, organizational development, and ombuds services.

Another aspect of conflict management and transformation is healing, forgiveness, reconciliation, and justice *(Hocker & Wilmot, 2014; Lederach, 2014; Zehr, 2002)*. These are aspects of transforming interpersonal conflict to create positive conditions and good relationships after conflicting parties have experienced harm. Harm may include feelings of betrayal, mistreatment, disrespect, or resentment, as well as loss of power, ownership, or resources. Trust may be eroded, making it difficult or impossible to proceed constructively without relational repair work. Some conflict is particularly harmful and enduring. When that kind of harm has been done, it can ruin a moment, a day, or a lifetime.

Whether intentional or inadvertent, harm occurs in community–higher education relationships. The harm may be caused by an individual—a student sprays graffiti on a neighborhood center. Sometimes the cause of harm is a policy—a community partner who had expected to share costs for food related to a service-learning project discovers, after costs have been incurred, that university/state policy does not allow reimbursement for food. And sometimes the cause of harm is a practice or an incident— the university buys and demolishes homes of long-time renters in an adjacent neighborhood to expand student housing. How do we enter these spaces in which people and communities feel harmed, and how do we repair them so that we might have positive and productive relationships and interactions in the future? These areas hold many scholarship and practitioner tools that can be further explored and developed as additional CEP competencies.

Conclusion

Conflict can be seen as a dance wherein

> participants have to learn how close and how far to move, how to regulate distance, when to slow down and when to speed up, how to maintain contact with part-

ners so you know where they will be, and how to end the dance. *(Lindbergh, 1955 as cited in Hocker & Wilmot, 2014, p. 55)*

If conflict is like a dance, then the competencies needed make up a dancer's repertoire. A dancer, or a CEP who is competent in interpersonal conflict, must learn, rehearse, and hone a series of "moves" or "steps" to achieve precision in execution. Over time, the dancer's continued practice provides a foundation of moves from which to improvise, giving a sense of grace, familiarity, and ownership. The experienced dancer (or CEP), through a sense of embodied knowledge and skill, establishes a level and style of performance, as well as gaining a comfort and confidence in the movements chosen, even when in a new situation, with a new partner, or in a new venue.

Conflict is incredibly complex. Like each relationship, each conflict is unique, as each person is situated in her or his own experiences, preferences, values, cultures, and goals. Perhaps one of the reasons the community engagement literature offers so little on interpersonal conflict is because conflict is embarrassing, and, well, *personal*. Focusing on organizational or cultural aspects of conflict, but not *also* including interpersonal elements of conflict, can take attention away from our own role in the conflict. For example, the misalignment of academic and community schedules is an oft-cited source of structural conflict experienced by CEPs and community partners. But how do individuals navigate known issues and structural tensions with their partners? What strategies do they use to communicate personally so that these potential sources of conflict are managed productively to create better understanding and stronger relationships? These are also important questions to consider and address.

The challenge, and limitation, of this reflective essay is to provide broad guidance on a topic that is necessarily complex and (inter)personal. We urge CEPs to recognize interpersonal conflict management as an area in which competencies can be developed and refined, and that a great deal of understanding and practice has been generated by many different disciplines. The quote attributed to Maya Angelou—"Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better"—is a helpful way to think about the intersection of the knowledge and skills CEPs must develop in order to be competent and confident in conflict management and conflict transformation. We feel that, so far, CEPs have been doing their best to engage across differences, learning

to manage various interpersonal conflicts through trial and error; however, we also feel that, as a field, we can know, and do, better. Developing a repertoire of motivation, knowledge, and skills in managing conflict can help us all do just that!

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About the Authors

Emily M. Janke is an associate professor in the Peace and Conflict Studies department and the director of the Institute for Community and Economic Engagement (ICEE) at the University of North Carolina Greensboro. Her teaching and scholarship explores multiple aspects of community engagement, including community–university relationships and partnerships; institutional culture and change strategies for higher education; and the role of reciprocity, communication, and tension in collaborative interdisciplinary and multisector relationships. She received her Ph.D. in higher education from The Pennsylvania State University.

Rebecca Dumlao is a professor in Communication at East Carolina University and an engaged faculty scholar with North Carolina Campus Compact. Her teaching and scholarship considers communication practices/processes in interpersonal, intercultural, and community-engaged settings, and includes conflict management. She received her Ph.D. in mass communication from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Actualizing Critical Commitments for Community Engagement Professionals

Elizabeth Tryon and Haley Madden

Abstract

Community engagement professionals (CEPs) often must develop and maintain equitable, high-quality relationships with community partners while supporting student learning and civic development through cocurricular community engagement or for-credit community-based learning programs. Lack of alignment between campus goals and values and those of communities creates challenges for CEPs. Our community partners have expressed the feeling that students were not adequately prepared for community engagement and that it is the university's job to prepare them. To support partnerships in inclusive and equitable ways, CEPs need to be skilled and comfortable with some critical, complex topics before they can train students or provide professional development to instructors. This reflective essay examines specific strategies for CEPs doing this work, informed by the literature, feedback from community partners and social justice training professionals, and classroom experience. Topics addressed include social identity, systems of privilege and oppression, cultural humility, and institutional–community power dynamics.
Keywords: preparing for community engagement, community engagement professional

Introduction

*I*n Dostilio's competency model *(2017)*, necessary skills for community engagement professionals (CEPs) include the ability to cultivate high-quality partnerships and facilitate students' civic learning and development, tasks that involve spanning boundaries between campus and community. Among other broad roles, CEPs may work alongside students at community organizations, send students into the community as part of coursework or volunteer groups, or consult with instructors on curriculum and partnership development. Tension often arises in this work when campus goals and values do not align with those of the community *(Weerts & Sandmann, 2010)*.

Although service- or community-based learning (CBL) has become a ubiquitous practice in higher education *(Butin, 2005; Furco, 2010)*, community partners have long expressed reservations

regarding the academy's uneven approach to building equitable partnerships *(Jagosh et al., 2012; Lantz, Viruell-Fuentes, Israel, Softley, & Guzman, 2001; Sandy & Holland, 2006).* Partner organizations we have talked to over the last 10 years want CEPs and instructors to be able to better prepare students to be and serve in the community *(Cramer, 2017; Stoecker, Tryon, & Hilgendorf, 2009; Tryon, Madden, & Sarmiento, 2016).* According to our partners, a prepared student is professional, culturally humble, self-aware, and knowledgeable about systemic issues and community context. We feel this feedback contains implications for strengthening CEP competencies and improving the ability of CEPs to prepare instructors and students in better upholding the values of equity, cultural humility, and inclusion that create good community engagement relationships.

In order to accomplish the vast and challenging goals in equity and inclusion work that our partners believe institutions should address, CEPs must have a discrete set of abilities. The CEP competency model outlines some functional areas around equitable practice, including facilitating students' civic learning and development, administering community engagement programs, and facilitating faculty development and support. In particular, CEPs are encouraged to have

- the *knowledge* of democratic engagement, students' developmental trajectories, and ways in which students' identities inform and frame their community engagement experience;
- the *skills* to facilitate inclusive, participatory, and reflective practice, collaborate with and support historically marginalized students, and maintain relationships;
- the *disposition* to embrace diversity and promote inclusion, humility, and critical thinking; and
- the critical *commitment* to developing their own and students' critical consciousness, challenging problematic language and contradictions within practice, disrupting unequal power structures, recognizing one's position related to privilege and oppression, and naming injustice. *(Dostilio, 2017, pp. 46–51, paraphrased)*

How do CEPs develop the ability to actualize these competencies? CEPs may believe fervently in the values and writings of Freire and other scholars and may already be painfully aware of their power and privilege *(Green, 2003)*, especially given that the field

seems to skew "predominantly white and female" *(Dostilio, 2017, p. 52)*. In Dostilio's volume, Hernandez and Pasquesi *(2017)* bring out some of these identity perspectives in Chapter 3 and make a good case for centering them. However, many CEPs may still need a fuller picture of what competencies of equity-building look like translated from theory to practice and how to actualize imparting them to students or instructors. CEPs may lack the luxury of reflection or reading time to digest new literature and may require "trainer training" to overcome their own conditioned responses to deeply entrenched systemic challenges, such as implicit biases. Unless they come out of an equity and inclusion professional background, CEPs may need support to locate and acquire that training and then find opportunities to flex new muscles in order to begin mastering these competencies.

Background

Our data gathering over the last decade on community partner experiences with students uncovered issues such as a widespread perception of cultural ignorance, savior mentality, and a mismatch between student personality style or personal beliefs and the need for sensitivity when working with vulnerable populations that make up the constituents of many community organizations students work with *(Cramer, 2017; Stoecker et al., 2009; Tryon et al., 2016)*. These findings were initially discovered during interviews with community partners, which led to creation of *The Unheard Voices: Community Organizations and Service Learning (Stoecker et al., 2009)*. These results were confirmed during a 2016 follow-up to *The Unheard Voices* in which students in a community-based research course conducted a survey, focus groups, and interviews with community partners who work with students through CBL classes or cocurricular programs *(Tryon et al., 2016)*. Further confirmation was provided during the process of developing the University of Wisconsin–Madison Civic Action Plan *(Campus Compact, 2016; Cramer, 2017)*, in which a community–campus committee sought feedback from on- and off-campus partners through surveys and intensive interviews about civic and community engagement. The number one recommendation of the UW's resultant Civic Action Plan was "Ensure preparation of UW–Madison stakeholders [students, staff, and faculty] for high-quality community-engaged work and partnership," where *high-quality* meant sustained, culturally sensitive and aware, collaborative and mutually beneficial with community partners *(Cramer, 2017)*.

Despite the noted shortcomings in student preparedness, most of our partners have continued to accept students as service-learners or research partners. Sometimes they do so from their altruistic desire to educate students about issues that communities outside the "ivory tower" face, just a short bike or bus ride from campus *(Bell & Carlson, 2009)*. Some organizations have worked with enough skilled and respectful students to make the burden of training the less competent a worthwhile trade-off *(Stoecker et al., 2009)*.

However, a sense was building at UW–Madison that it was the university's responsibility, not the community's, to prepare students before they began their community-engaged work, so that limited student hours could be maximized on project work and students could begin the relationship with the principle of "at least, do no harm." Because our center for public service had been hearing these insights so repeatedly, we began to put in place some programs to mitigate negative experiences that community partners reported in relationships with instructors and students.

In some informal roundtables our center for public service hosted over the last few years, we talked with instructors and social justice professionals who were experienced in preparing students to engage in equitable ways, and we began compiling their recommended resources on our website. Our center also employs a number of upper level undergraduates as community-based learning interns who fan out over more than a dozen CBL courses per semester to assist instructors with logistical support, partner communication, student troubleshooting, reading/annotating reflections, and class discussions. Our professional staff observed that students attracted to apply for these internships often come with skills in facilitating intercultural dialogues, promoting social justice, and supporting culturally humble learning environments. They also tend to be engaged citizens, whether in local or global communities, with diverse backgrounds and lived experiences. Our staff noticed that material they delivered in class presentations was well received by their peers, and instructors were appreciative of their work. Capitalizing on these synergies, we asked the interns to help develop a training module to prepare students for entering their CBL experience. Much of the material we highlight in this essay comes from this combination of sources.

In the following sections, we will review the literature on faculty and student professional development for community engagement to bring in a diverse array of perspectives that may be useful for CEPs. Additionally, we will examine some of the specific strate-

gies that CEPs can learn and use to prepare students directly or help instructors prepare students for community engagement. Strategies include determining topics for student trainings to maximize impact; finding activities to facilitate learning around social justice, self-awareness, and societal issues; and developing skills to facilitate discussions of equity and critical consciousness in the classroom. One point may be obvious but cannot be stressed enough: In our experience and anecdotally, this preparation cannot be considered "accomplished" in a 1-hour workshop. That may be all the time the instructor can allot, but our informal observations have shown that student learning and community interaction outcomes will improve if the content is woven in throughout the course. Future research on the impact of different training durations may provide more specific guidelines, but we have not found literature on this point. Working toward these competencies is complicated for all stakeholders in an ever-changing world, and our hope is that this essay provides just some of the resources CEPs might integrate into their toolkit for developing a training curriculum.

What Work to Prepare Students Is Currently Going On?

Community-based learning (CBL) is often thought of as a way to prepare students for future careers or vocational positions *(Eyler, Giles, Stenson, & Gray, 2001)*. Indeed, CBL and other community engagement work often have myriad benefits for students that have been extensively documented, including developing a sense of civic engagement *(Celio, Durlak, & Dymnicki, 2011)*, increased understanding of academic content *(Celio, Durlak, & Dymnicki, 2011; Eyler et al., 2001)*, and increased cultural humility *(Hampson, 2007; Schamber & Mahoney, 2008)*. However, there has been little consideration in the academic literature of preengagement student preparation/ training to work with diverse communities. Even when community partners have longer term relationships with faculty or other CEPs who send students into the community, students themselves are by nature transitory, further necessitating training to help them "plug in" to a relationship smoothly and respectfully.

Some disciplines do have at least *some* built-in preparation of students for community engagement. In the health field, volunteers need training for specific tasks. They may be working with hospice patients *(Wilkinson & Wilkinson, 1986)* or acting as patient navigators *(Duggleby et al., 2018)*. Health volunteers may also learn about the specific circumstances they will be working in. For example, Floyd *(2013)* examined a volunteer midwife program in Haiti and

noted that the Haitian health care professionals wished the volunteer midwives knew exactly how Haitians lived, including their historical context, everyday routines, health care experiences, and available resources. As one health care worker said, "They can't come here with the attitude that they are going to change things in one week. . . . Discard that attitude; come here with humility and eagerness to help in whatever way" *(Floyd, 2013, p. 563)*.

Matthew, Hockett, and Samek *(2018)* also noted the challenge of preparing health care workers for international contexts, adding that health care volunteers should be familiar with the medical contexts of the volunteer locations along with the overall challenges faced by the community. CEPs included case studies in their volunteer training materials so volunteers could familiarize themselves with the situations they might encounter, stressing guidelines for work in a new country, historical and cultural information, local customs, safety information, and understanding local needs *(Floyd, 2013)*. Preparation for international work often focuses on cultural humility or awareness, "an others-oriented stance associated with curiosity, desire for understanding, and acceptance, while remaining free of egotism or arrogance" *(Owen et al., 2016, p. 31)*.

Other training programs have also recognized the importance of cultural humility, which can be described as a "process that requires humility as individuals continually engage in self-reflection and self-critique as lifelong learners and reflective practitioners" *(Tervalon & Murray-García, 1998, p. 118)*. For example, one library tutor-training program developed because librarians noticed problematic behavior from tutors, including "declaring that a student's name is too difficult for them to pronounce, failing to support more boisterous students, making assumptions about the culture and home life of a student, and being unable to relate to diverse life experiences" *(Andrew, Kim, & Watanabe, 2018, p. 20)*. The resultant training focused on structural racism, cultural humility, and interrupting bias, providing ample opportunity for participants to talk through challenging situations and brainstorm solutions. Some campuses have even provided a focus on developing increased cultural humility campuswide or statewide, such as the Collaborative for Intercultural Advancement at the University of Minnesota *(Furco & Lockhart, 2018)* and the Cultural Agility Coalition, begun as a Minnesota Campus Compact grant *(Brown et al., 2016)*. We have found some additional evidence on cultural training in teacher education (e.g., *Diaz, 1992*) but little for CEPs in their responsibilities of preparing students for engagement in CBL or community-based research (CBR) specifically.

Community partners themselves are quick to point out that *their* staff are actually best positioned to deliver preparatory training, as they have the most up-to-date and "on the ground" knowledge about issues in a community *(Tryon et al., 2016)*. Some CEPs have used this model, and it has distinct benefits: community empowerment, validation of community knowledge, authenticity, and real-world critical reflection *(Kline, Godolphin, Chhina, & Towle, 2013)*. However, community partners may lack time for advanced student preparation (or don't wish to use the students' limited time on site for such training), and the university may not have the funding to compensate their staff time for this extra work. Instead, community partners prefer students to start such preparation *before* entering the community *(Cramer, 2017)*.

What Should CEPs Know in Order to Prepare Students?

Although we have no exhaustive list of topics CEPs should consider when helping students enter the community, we have compiled those below based on our experiences and community perspectives from the data-gathering efforts described above. These are broad, complex topics that we are only able to cover briefly here. They should be further explored by CEPs and then integrated throughout a semester course *(Hanssmann, Morrison, & Russian, 2008)*. We have annotated a list of resources we hope you might peruse at *https://morgridge.wisc.edu/faculty-staff/community-based-learning-resources-and-partners/cultural-resources/*.

Although we recognize that CEPs may be asked to perform this preparatory work without initial hands-on training, ideally this work should be facilitated by people who are very familiar with the content *(Gay, 1992; A. Miller, personal communication, March 14, 2017)*. If a campus lacks skilled cultural awareness, social justice, or other equity training professionals who can consult with CEPs on this curriculum, it may be best to hire local experts to review the curriculum or initially deliver this information within the local context and considerations. Depending on the skills and experience of the CEPs at a university, this could take the form of a multiyear partnership in which CEPs complete this curriculum to become qualified to train students and instructors. These messages can easily be diluted or garbled when using a train the trainer model, so mentoring of instructors and other trainers is key to ensure skills are fully transferring. At some schools, CEPs are hired to train students directly, and at other times they work with instructors who then

train their students. (Our staff frames instructor learning opportunities as "faculty development," which seems to resonate more with faculty than "training.") As we dive into following sections below, language focuses on CEPs training students and instructors for simplicity, but readers should bear in mind the need for CEPs to first receive enough training to be or support the student trainers.

Understanding Student Motives

Before beginning community engagement, it is helpful for the CEP to ask students why they are interested in doing it. Do they want to help or give back? Are they eager to learn about unfamiliar cultures? Are they ambivalent about community engagement in general, but have a degree requirement? At this stage, CEPs may learn about reasons for service that are admirable yet problematic. Many students are interested in "service to help the less fortunate" and view service as a unidirectional flow of assistance. Majority and economically secure students may have some awareness of their own privilege and see service as a way to "give back" to the community. Often, these ways of thinking indicate that the student is viewing the experience through a charity or savior lens *(Brown, 2014)*. This lens may inherently imply judgment; students with a savior mentality are likely not recognizing community members as coeducators with complex stories, lives, and contexts, but are viewing community-engaged experiences in the deficit model *(Bauer, Kniffen, & Priest, 2015; Boyle-Baise & Efiom, 1999; Seethaler, 2014)*.

Having more insight into the level of sophistication in the student's thought process can guide the training. Redirecting the student can encourage them to develop empathy, rather than sympathy or pity, and prompt the student to reflect on their own thought patterns and behaviors that may be (often unintentionally) dehumanizing, degrading, and disrespectful. Another factor to consider is the spectrum of experience, upbringing, and training within any given classroom, even at a primarily White institution. Therefore instructors or CEPs cannot make assumptions about students' starting points and should assess and guide students in a way that doesn't shame the least competent while keeping the interest of the more skilled class members. This may be done by reserving judgment on students' perspectives and instead asking questions to encourage students to explain and question their own positions. Another strategy is to set clear conversational guidelines for class discussions, such as providing language to use around difficult or unfamiliar topics.

Social Identity

Social identity is an individual sense of self based on the groups one belongs to *(Tajfel & Turner, 1979)*. Some examples include sexual orientation, race, age, ability, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, education level, and immigration status. These identities are inherently social because their salience can change based on social settings (e.g., religious identity is more salient during a religious service), and they can be completely socially constructed, yet with very real implications (e.g., race).

When guiding students in learning about social identity, it is helpful for them to reflect on the visibility or invisibility of their identities. Some components are likely more visible than others, such as physical ability, whereas some may be difficult or impossible to visibly see, such as mental illness *(Matthews & Harrington, 2000; Tajfel, 1974)*. One can use social identity to bond with similar others or alienate those who are different, leading to prejudice and discrimination *(McLeod, 2008)*. To honor the social identity of others and avoid stereotyping, students can be encouraged to question assumptions while staying curious and nonjudgmental. Exercises can spur students to think more critically about social identity when interacting with community members, such as this "Identity List" Activity:

1. Write a list of identities on the board: race, ethnicity, gender, sex, sexuality, ability, religion/belief system, SES, education, hometown.
2. Provide definitions if need arises.
3. Have students write down their identities as they relate to the identity categories. Emphasize that they should **organize this list by their choosing (vertically)**.
4. Once finished, direct them to cross out the fourth, sixth, and eighth items on their lists.
5. Lists should then be reorganized from most to least important, vertically.
6. Cross out everything below the top three.

Possible Discussion Questions:

Disclaimer: Students can choose not to participate if they are feeling uncomfortable at any point. The discussion space should be respected and focus should be on students who are sharing their thoughts.

1. What are the top three identities on your list?
2. How did it feel to cross out your identities?
3. Have you ever felt that some of your identities are "crossed out"/unnoticed on campus? Which ones and why? Which identities are emphasized? How does this affect your day-to-day life?
4. Are those the most important identities? Why/why not?
5. In what social contexts would the ranking of your prioritized identities change? Why?
6. From what you've read about this course, which identities do you feel will play the most crucial role in your community learning? How?

Systems of Privilege and Oppression

As students begin to understand social identity, it is also useful to explore how systems of oppression and privilege operate using social identity. Oppression functions at the interpersonal level through prejudice and discrimination, but when that behavior is combined with institutional power, institutional oppression (and its counterpart, privilege) affects entire groups, peoples, and identities. Much has been written on this topic by those more expert. As Goodman *(2015)* states:

> While prejudices are harmful to everyone, when a group has social power—access to societal resources and decision-making—they can enforce their prejudices on a societal level, which becomes oppression. A shorthand definition is: prejudice + social power = oppression. Advantaged groups have the social power to act on their prejudice. This can take the form of denying people from subordinated groups access to good jobs, housing, education or health care or being more likely to arrest and incarcerate them. *(p. 2)*

This system of oppression benefits one group (often called the dominant or advantaged group) over another (often called the target or disadvantaged group). Table 1 lists examples of privileged and targeted identities.

Table 1. Privileged and Targeted Identities

Social identity category	Privileged social groups	Border social groups	Targeted social groups	Ism
Race	White people	Biracial people	Asian, Black, Latinx, Indigenous people	Racism
Sexuality	Heterosexual people	Bisexual people	Lesbian, gay, asexual people	Heterosexism
Gender identity	Gender conforming (cis) bio men and women	Gender ambiguous people	Transgender, gender-queer, intersex people	Transgender oppression
Ability	Temporarily able-bodied people	Individuals with temporary disabilities	People with disabilities	Ableism
Religion	Protestants	Catholics, Agnostics	Muslims, Jews, Atheists, Hindus	Religious oppression
Citizenship status	Native-born United States citizens	Naturalized citizens, refugees, DACA recipients	Undocumented immigrants	Nationalism

When discussing systems of privilege and oppression with students, CEPs may want to point out that although individuals are operating in these systems (and are therefore a part of them), the injustice of a system does not equate to interpersonal injustice; no single individual is responsible for systemic oppression. Ask students to consider the systems of privilege and oppression that are operationalized in their community engagement settings. How are these systems shaping circumstances and individuals? How do these systems affect the community organization? What does this mean for creating lasting change and equity? Encouraging students to consider these systems not only encourages them to see the "invisible matrix" of oppression that is shaping the world around them (including their community engagement site), it can also deepen their reflection and critical thinking.

Implicit Bias

Social identity and systems of oppression are inextricably linked to implicit bias, bias for or against a group of people without

conscious awareness of the bias *(Greenwald & Krieger, 2006; Tetlock & Mitchell, 2009)*. Implicit bias typically occurs instantly and unconsciously, rather than resulting from deeper thinking processes. This is demonstrated in dual processing theory or the elaboration likelihood model as follows: System 1 or peripheral processing occurs very quickly or automatically with little effort, often using visual cues and stereotypes, when there is little motivation or ability to think critically about a situation, like getting out of the way of an out-of-control car *(Evans, 2003; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986)*. System 2 or central processing is slower and deliberative, allowing for conscious thought, and is used when people have the motivation and ability to think critically, such as when making a large purchase. Trouble arises when one uses System 1 processing instead of System 2 during interpersonal interactions, resulting in implicit bias. One exercise that can illuminate implicit bias for students is to ask them to take an implicit bias test, such as those found on *https://implicit. harvard.edu/*. CEPs need to do some context-setting before administering these, especially giving students an explanation of what the tests are designed to do, how they can be helpful to an individual's self-understanding of their split-second judgments, and how everyone's brain is hard-wired to contain these biases *(Greenwald & Krieger, 2006; Tetlock & Mitchell, 2009)*.

There are several strategies to overcome implicit bias. One can develop mindfulness in thought patterns, slowing down responses and encouraging awareness of instances that may create them. Numerous instances of implicit bias appear in the media; examples include *Scandal, Grey's Anatomy, Parks and Recreation, Dear White People*, and *Insecure (for links to these and other resources, please feel free to contact the authors)*. Using clips from these and other sources can exemplify the concept for students by providing concrete examples of what implicit bias can look like from familiar contemporary perspectives. Reflection questions based on these media clips can help students identify what is going on in them and develop a plan for addressing implicit bias when it occurs, reflecting on their own social language and behavior. Acknowledging that all people have implicit biases can be very powerful for students, as they realize they are not alone in their understanding and experience.

Microaggressions

Understanding implicit bias and social identity can pave the way for students to consider microaggressions. According to Sue *(2010)*:

> Microaggressions are the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership. In many cases, these hidden messages may invalidate the group identity or experiential reality of target persons, demean them on a personal or group level . . . threaten and intimidate, or relegate them to inferior status and treatment. *(para. 2)*

Microaggressions often seem innocuous to the person committing them and may be a result of unknown implicit bias coming alive in a stereotype. Typical mistakes can include phrases like *Where are you from? You are so articulate! You are a credit to your race*. Microaggressions can also come in the form of behaviors, including *Crossing the street when you see a black man. A police officer repeatedly pulling over a person of Color. A person in a wheelchair being ignored by a server*. Cumulatively, these microaggressions contribute to increased stress and poor well-being for those with disadvantaged identities *(Balsam, Molina, Beadnell, Simoni, & Walters, 2011; Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder, 2008)*.

Students and CEPs, even with training, will inevitably commit an occasional microaggression in the course of their work and daily lives, but to improve their relationships it is important to recognize what they did wrong, apologize, and reflect on what to do differently in the future. Those mistakes may also indicate to a student that they have more learning to do in a certain area.

Cultural Humility

Culture can be thought of as "the way people do things around here" or way of life *(Martin, 2006)*. It has many behavioral manifestations, including food, language, and clothing style, as well as deeper levels of cultural values and interpretations such as thoughts about what is right or wrong and interpretation of everyday situations *(Hall, 1976)*. Culture can be both broad (e.g., of a country) and very specific (e.g., of a classroom). As with social identity, understanding culture begins with self-reflection and understanding one's own culture before trying to understand others'. By examining their own group membership, interpretation styles, and behaviors and contrasting them with those of other cultures, students may begin to recognize their own normative values and begin to understand that other cultural ways of doing things are not wrong, just different.

This type of reflection allows students to learn about other cultures and can help students resist evaluating them. For example, cultures can have dissimilar conceptualizations of time and punctuality. In many Indigenous communities, it is appropriate to begin a meeting when the time feels right to do so, rather than a designated starting time *(Brant, 1990)*. This understanding is different from a Midwestern sense of punctuality in which being considered on time could mean showing up five minutes early to a meeting. It may be helpful for students to consider instances when they were in another culture (e.g., studying abroad), the differences they noticed, and what made them feel comfortable or uncomfortable in a situation.

One can strive for "cultural humility"—or continuous reflection on cultural differences and similarities—and approach other cultures with a willingness to learn and an open mind rather than relying on cultural generalizations and assumptions (*Owen et al., 2016; Tervalon & Murray-Garciá, 1998*). Cultural humility also encourages students to understand the context and history of the communities they are working in. For example, we have created a short guide to an area of our city that has a high number of nonprofits and a historically underresourced population. CEPs can use such resources to help their students get to know the community and develop a more robust appreciation of the assets of its residents and cultures before initiating their engaged work.

Power Dynamics

In Dostilio's 2017 volume on CEPs, Hernandez and Pasquesi *(2017)* review some of the literature exploring the power differential between universities and communities and present a solid rationale for examining and disrupting this imbalance as much as possible *(pp. 64–66)*. In general, although universities face their own pressures, they hold greater resources and prestige than community organizations. Those working and studying within them have access to a myriad of opportunities often inaccessible to many community members (e.g., transportation, library access, meeting space, experts, public communication channels, technology). Universities also have a keen desire to protect their self-interest and avoid liability. Too often, university partners initiate and control projects rather than working alongside community constituents on their priorities, using the outputs for professional gain (e.g., to publish research, receive tenure, or earn course credit) even if the outcome has no benefit for the community partner. Cash funding is often in the hands of the institution and used to control the partnership

process *(Lantz et al., 2001).* Due to institutional inflexibility, financial incentives to communities that would increase and enhance their participation and lead to more successful outcomes are often difficult or disallowed *(Horowitz, Robinson, & Seifer, 2009).*

CEPS should reflect on the specific imbalances between their institutions and community partners, even with all the previous factors set aside, and communicate the pieces of that dynamic to students. Understanding this dynamic informs the issue of trust or the lack thereof *(Horowitz et al., 2009; Israel, Schulz, Parker, & Becker, 1998).* In examining trust, CEPs, students, and partners can ask:

> Is there transparency in decision-making? Is there follow-through on promises? Are relevant parties included throughout? Without trust, there is little chance of developing a relationship where all parties are given the "benefit of the doubt." Without this factor, if a partner's action produces harm, the other partner may assume . . . it was intentional. *(Tryon, Slaughter, & Ross, 2015, p. 194)*

Students and CEPs may not be able to change this power structure, but they can act in more equitable ways to build mutual trust and share power in relationships. The following list of practices should be considered a starting point in this process.

1. Focusing on community-identified priorities and end products *(Beckman, Penney, & Cockburn, 2011; Strand, Cutforth, Stoecker, Marullo, & Donohue, 2003).*
2. Using an asset-based approach rather than focusing solely on community deficits *(Minkler & Wallerstein, 2011).*
3. Respecting community members as coeducators with valuable knowledge and experience essential for project success *(Clayton, Bringle, Senor, Huq, & Morrison, 2010).*
4. Using communication methods preferred by the community and asking for partners' feedback *(Stoecker et al., 2009).*
5. Sharing decision-making power by use of community advisory or ethics review boards *(Blumenthal, 2006; Quinn, 2004; Shore, 2007).*
6. Cocreating research designs *(Mauser et al., 2013).* As we heard from one community partner, "Every time I hear the word 'research' I want to run the other way screaming! But if the researcher asked me what I would be interested in

having data on, that would be a different story" *(community partner, personal communication, March 7, 2007).*

Special Considerations

Talking about issues of identity, oppression, culture, and power is very complex, and CEPs must be able to navigate them with skill, but some considerations can help these discussions progress. First, CEPs can reflect on the characteristics of students entering the community. At our institution, 69% of the student body is White and 19% are students of Color, excluding international students who make up the balance *(Office of the Registrar, 2018).* In contrast, around 58% of noninternational college students in the United States are White *(U.S. Department of Education, 2018).* Not surprisingly, the feedback from our partners primarily indicated the need to train White students to work with their constituents of Color. CBL courses and community engagement programs often have a significant number of White students who may be unfamiliar with conversations around race, culture, and power. Although it may be easy to focus on White students, centering on their experiences and normalizing Whiteness, CEPs and instructors need to make space in the classroom for all voices and levels of consciousness. Racial affinity spaces may be helpful for students if White students need space to process the meaning of Whiteness and White guilt *(Michael & Conger, 2009).* In decentering the White experience during community engagement preparation, it may be tempting for CEPs to lean on the wisdom and knowledge of their students of Color and other marginalized identities, singling them out for questions and looking to them for guidance. Those students cannot speak for their entire race or other social identity group, nor should they be asked to do so. Instead, all students in the classroom can be encouraged to share their stories and lived experiences if they feel comfortable. It is crucial that CEPs feel confident when facilitating these discussions, and we reiterate the advice to engage specialists if needed to help CEPs learn to avoid unintended negative outcomes.

As CEPs discuss these difficult topics with students or support instructors in preparing students, it can be useful to cocreate a foundational agreement with students for the discussion. Discussion leaders should note, however, that these agreements can be a double-edged sword. Students may use them as a "safe" space for espousing views that are harmful to others, presenting false information as a "valid" opinion, ignoring the negative impact of a well-intentioned statement, or allowing dominant narratives and power structures to remain in place *(Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2014).*

Luckily, other authors have thought critically on this issue and developed more updated discussion guidelines *(Arao & Clemens, 2013; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2014)*. Sensoy and DiAngelo *(2014)* offer nuanced guidelines that may be useful to start from when creating a foundational agreement, focusing on humility, understanding the difference between opinion and knowledge, and accepting discomfort as part of growth.

Intergroup dialogue (IGD) also presents a useful framework for facilitating classroom discussions. IGD provides a facilitated space to discuss difficult and polarizing topics through collaborations, relationships, critical self-reflection, and appreciation of difference, without assumptions and the need for determining what is right or wrong *(Dessel & Rogge, 2008)*. Although other authors can provide more specific details about this process, some initial techniques include sustained communication, critical social awareness, and bridge building. These are achieved by creating an environment for dialogue, learning about differences and commonalities of experience, exploring conflicts and multiple perspectives, and moving to action through alliance-building *(Zúñiga, 2003)*. Constructive dialogues occur when people feel comfortable with each other, which speaks to the importance of encouraging students to get to know each other through icebreakers, team-building experiences, and plenty of opportunities to work together.

Conclusion

Dostilio's *(2017)* competency model for community-engaged professionals is a seminal, groundbreaking step toward standardizing skills and best practices for CEPs. This reflective essay suggests further clarifying several of Dostilio's desired competencies while also outlining ways for CEPs to develop the *knowledge, skills and abilities*, and *dispositions* to work toward them. In order for CEPs to build high-quality partnerships, especially when working across lines of identity as many CEP partnerships do, they must possess or develop self-awareness of their social identities, culture, and how they move through the world, as well as a deep understanding of systems of privilege, oppression, and power *(Diaz, 1992; Einfeld & Collins, 2008; Wallerstein & Duran, 2006; Weil, Reisch, & Ohmer, 2012)*. If CEPs hope to support students' civic learning and development, they must educate students on these topics before and during community engagement. This requires CEPs to have *knowledge* of these topics, the *ability* to educate others on them, a growth mindset (*disposition*) that humbly recognizes learning is never finished, and a *critical commitment* to keep improving and admit it when they fall

short. Community partners have plainly told us that preparatory work is no longer optional if faculty, students, and other CEPs wish to continue to partner with them, and indeed, we unfortunately still hear about partnerships that dissolve because of students' poor preparation *(Ladson-Billings, 1999; Quezada, Alexandrowicz, & Molina, 2018)*. As higher education institutions struggle to maintain their relevance in their communities, sustaining excellent collaborative community partnerships must be a top priority for CEPs and the people they support.

CEPs and students alike can never be fully prepared for every situation they may encounter when working with community partners, and this essay is not intended to provide a comprehensive guide for preparation. Rather, we have highlighted some major topics worthy of reflection and attention and will applaud all energies directed toward integrating more cultural humility and equity/inclusion work into the CEP competency model. We hope this essay acts as a starting point to a larger conversation about the work CEPs, students, and universities must perform to support high-quality community partnerships and student civic development.

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About the Authors

Elizabeth Tryon is the Assistant Director for Community-Engaged Scholarship at the University of Wisconsin's Morgridge Center for Public Service. She runs professional development programs for faculty, graduate students, and undergrads and travels to facilitate national and international workshops. She received her M.A. in education from Edgewood College.

Haley Madden works as the Community-Engaged Scholarship Specialist at the Morgridge Center for Public Service at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where she supports community-based learning and research. Her research interests include health equity, science communication, and increasing institutional support for quality community-engaged scholarship. She received her Ph.D. in Mass Communications from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Community Engagement Professionals as Inquiring Practitioners for Organizational Learning

H. Anne Weiss and Kristin E. Norris

Abstract

This essay examines the inquiry activities that community engagement professionals (CEPs) can utilize to support organizational learning. We advocate for an inquiry approach that focuses on improvement and informing community-engaged practices and organizational change. By unpacking why inquiry is imperative for CEPs and outlining the tensions that may arise, we introduce three concepts: inquiry consists of different yet connected activities including, but not limited to, assessing student learning; CEPs are key knowledge workers in higher education; and, finally, CEPs can and should leverage inquiry to inform institutional planning and systematically align policies, processes, and procedures to demonstrate our public missions for society and other key stakeholders.

Keywords: inquiry, community engagement professional, organizational learning, assessment, evaluation, tracking, monitoring

Introduction

*T*he purpose of this essay is to reflect upon the activities of inquiry within community engagement broadly and the implications for community engagement professionals (CEPs) specifically. The term *inquiry* is used here to acknowledge the variety of approaches, purposes, and methodologies that researchers, evaluators, assessors, critical consumers, and reflexive practitioners use to pragmatically improve their work and to advance community engagement in higher education writ large. Examples of inquiry include, but are not limited to, research that produces new knowledge for the field of community engagement, evaluating whether a program or course is "of good quality," assessing gains in student civic learning, and measuring community impact.

Assessment is another commonly used term in the community engagement field and higher education broadly, which is appropriate when referencing student learning. However, Hersh and Keeling *(2013)* argue that higher education should strive for a culture of learning rather than a culture of assessment. Therefore, we

use the term *inquiry* because it is more encompassing and because it accurately represents activities such as tracking, monitoring, assessment, evaluation, and research—all of which allow us to ask questions, gather and interpret data, and use results to improve and inform processes, policies, or practices.

John Dewey *(1938, 2018)* defined *inquiry* in its most basic sense as "the intertwining of thought and action that proceeds from doubt to the resolution of doubt" *(p. 11)*. That is, the inquiring practitioner searches for any action that "works" better or sufficiently within the context of the problem at hand, and the inquiry can cease as soon as the desired result(s) are achieved. Inquiry can be continuous, informing and answering new questions garnered during or from the prior inquiry activity. This is a pragmatic approach to inquiry, which differs from typical "scientific investigation" and means that trained and competent CEPs can utilize the activities of inquiry to inform their own practices, better the practices and decisions of groups across their institution, assist or lead learning moments for the organization, and produce new knowledge through the traditional methods of "scientific investigation." For the purpose of this essay, we focus on a pragmatic approach to inquiry that supports learning moments for the organization.

Within inquiry we get to ask questions, gather insights, contemplate, analyze, or evaluate in order to provide useful insights about the practices, policies, programs, pedagogies, and constituents of community engagement. Having CEPs engage in inquiry activities in an ongoing, consistent, and systematic manner is important because of the growing skepticism of higher education's public purpose *(Boyer, 1996)*. According to a national survey of senior academic leaders, "colleges and universities must more clearly and persuasively communicate relevant, timely, and contextualized information on their impact on students *and value to society* [emphasis added]" *(Jankowski, Timmer, Kinzie, & Kuh, 2018, p. 4)*. Furthermore, "institutions must find ways to use assessment data internally to inform and strengthen education, *and externally to communicate with policy makers, families, and other stakeholders* [emphasis added]" *(p. 7)*.

Community engagement is a fundamental aspect of our institutional missions and, as illustrated by the previously offered source, institutions are under increasing pressure to demonstrate effectiveness in their public mission and beyond. Competencies surrounding the activities of inquiry are, therefore, imperative for the collective future of higher education and specifically the practice of institutionalizing and improving community engagement in higher

education. Therefore, whether or not inquiry is an explicit aspect of a CEP's job description, inquiry is often an assumed responsibility largely influenced by pressures of accountability (to a supervisor, to stakeholders, and to the public) or for gaining awards and public recognition (e.g., Carnegie's Elective Classification for Community Engagement). In this way we believe that CEPs must acquire some level of competency for inquiry. For example, CEPs must be capable and competent in developing strategic, meaningful, and doable (i.e., measureable) or timely inquiry questions, identifying the necessary data points, interpreting results, and reporting results to a variety of constituents, decision makers, and stakeholders. It is essential and necessary, therefore, to strengthen inquiry practices surrounding community engagement in higher education in order to help demonstrate the value of higher education to society.

Differentiating Inquiry Activities for CEPs

In this section we will distinguish among inquiry activities for community engagement by identifying and defining the broad categories of activities associated with inquiry: tracking or monitoring, assessment, evaluation, and research. It is important to note that the definitions and examples included here will differ across disciplines, roles, and professionals or practitioners within higher education. Much as in the community engagement literature, terms may be interpreted, redefined, or refined over time and context, so what we offer here is up for reinterpretation and discussion.

Activity: Tracking or Monitoring

Tracking and *monitoring* mean implementing systems and procedures that allow community engagement professionals to "follow" or see what students, faculty, and staff are doing in relation to community engagement (e.g., courses, events, programs, research, outreach, sustained initiatives, anchor work, grants). Tracking and monitoring require us to connect to other sources of data from across campus that may not focus on community engagement but track something related to our constituents' learning, productivity, satisfaction, and/or success during their time at our institution (learning management platforms, faculty annual reporting or productivity tracking, staff and faculty satisfaction with employment or advancement opportunities, etc.). The types of data that should be connected to tracking and monitoring community engagement include, but are not limited to

- *Data points related to the activity itself:* goal or name of the activity; community partner information (type of organization, address, contact information); length of partnership; curricular or cocurricular connection(s); intended outcomes; funders (external or internal); scholarly outputs; whether the activity is tied to other campus-based initiatives (diversity and inclusion, global learning, community priorities such as quality of life, grand challenges, etc.); and so on.

- *Data points about the community:* location of the community-based or community-engaged activity; social issue(s) addressed; population(s) served; roles that community plays; how this work relates to community priorities.

- *Data points about constituents of the campus:* demographics, financial aid, enrollment, student success metrics (e.g., DFW rate, persistence from semester to semester or year to year, grade point average [GPA], satisfaction [i.e., course evaluations]); faculty status, type, demographics; staff involvement; schools, departments, centers/institutes involved.

- *Data points or metrics related to other anchor initiatives for your campus/location:* percentage of minority hires in staff positions; percentage of local hires in staff positions; operating funds spent on economic development; businesses created and retained by/with the institution; percentage (or amount) of university procurement to local businesses; percentage (or amount) of university procurement to minority- and/or women-owned businesses; dollars spent on neighborhood development; dollars spent on environmental health initiatives; and much more *(Sladek, 2017, pp. 57–58).*

We have identified these four types of data to call attention to the wide variety of data needed in order to robustly engage in tracking and monitoring. The data points about the community are particularly challenging given the traditional systems and processes within higher education, yet addressing them is imperative if we are to examine the collective impact of community engagement (i.e., community impact, issue impact, and capacity-building of our community partners). We also acknowledge that CEPs cannot be, nor should they be, solely responsible for tracking or collecting all of this data. Instead, CEPs should have some level of competency to

effectively advocate for integrative (vs. additive) systems and processes that capture these types of data and to work with others who are instrumental in supporting our shared goals around tracking and monitoring.

Tracking and monitoring are usually performed through some form of information technology (IT) platform, whether a vended platform such as GivePulse, Collaboratory, Galaxy Digital, or Digital Measures/Activity Insights or a home-grown platform (i.e., not vended). IT is still considered as important to business and higher education today as the steam engine was to the industrial revolution, and in this way, tracking and monitoring (via IT platforms) are becoming an integral part of CEP duties—pulling from various IT platforms who is doing what, with whom, and to what ends . . . at a moment's notice. IT platforms are, however, a rather resource-intensive endeavor on any campus; IT requires not only money but large amounts of time to implement, and many different forms of capital (social and political capital being the most useful) to onboard and sustain the use of such platforms by a variety of constituents. Therefore, organizations that invest in IT to track and monitor their constituents' community engagement will need to eventually ask questions about the relationship between IT investment and organizational performance or productivity *(Dhning & Richardson, 2002; Lucas, 1999; Sircar, Turnbow, & Bordoloi, 2000)*.

Activity: Assessment

The majority of assessment of community engagement is driven by desires to articulate the extent to which the university, course, or program is fostering student civic-mindedness *(Norris & Weiss, in press)*, instilling what it means to be part of a society and how to engage as part of that society *(Dewey, 1916; Dickson, 1979; Jefferson, 1812)*. *A Crucible Moment (National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, 2012)* suggested that colleges develop civic pathways for students' civic learning that combine rich knowledge of democratic principles with practices with the community and making participation a requirement for every student. And in 2018, Campus Compact launched the Education for Democracy initiative, which was supported and informed by a group of visionary college presidents and chancellors who are committed to fostering the knowledge, skills, and motivations necessary for a thriving democracy with our communities *(see https://compact.org/education-for-democracy/)*. Being set up in this way, the activity of assessment has focused primarily on the learning outcomes associated with community-based or community-engaged

pedagogical practices. Although not exhaustive, there is a plethora of scholarship regarding the positive and statistically significant relationships between participating in service-learning and gains in students' disciplinary, interdisciplinary, and transdisciplinary (specifically, civic) learning, development, and success during college *(Celio, Durlak, & Dymnicki, 2011; Conway, Amel, & Gerwien, 2009; Warren, 2012; Yorio & Ye, 2012).*

Assessing student outcomes will continue to be important for CEPs, as well it should be, given that our workplaces are first and foremost institutions of higher learning. The assessment activities within inquiry competencies that a CEP needs are twofold: (1) conducting assessment of student learning and developmental outcomes and (2) supporting and building capacity for faculty and staff to assess their courses or programs for students' learning. These assessments may be formative or summative, indirect or direct, but they should predominantly focus on student learning and success during college. The preliminary competency model for community engagement professionals *(Dostilio et al., 2017)* directly addresses this aspect of inquiry in the rows "Facilitating Students' Civic Learning and Development" and "Facilitating Faculty Development and Support."

More recently, the work of assessment has expanded to include the outcomes of participating in professional development experiences for faculty or staff who are practicing community-based or community-engaged scholarship *(Welch & Plaxton-Moore, 2017).* Meanwhile, others call for a shift to reprioritize community outcomes above student learning outcomes, urging us to remember and trust that, if planned well, student learning will happen *(Stoecker, 2016).* In all, most of the work around assessment still prioritizes *students'* learning, development, and success outcomes. Moving forward, assessment will need to involve other outcomes and other types of community-engaged activities (e.g., research and creative activities, outreach, anchor mission work; *Norris & Weiss, 2019).*

Activity: Evaluation

Evaluation is gaining greater attention due to the questions CEPs and other stakeholders are beginning to ask about the fidelity of interventions that connect campus with community (e.g., outreach programs, anchor institution initiatives, extension work, and sustained service programs). Evaluating the fidelity of an intervention means measuring the degree to which the intervention is delivered as intended. Although there are many purposes for con-

ducting evaluation, implementation fidelity is often used because it helps answer questions about how the *design* of the experience influences a variety of outcomes. Implementation fidelity is, therefore, critical for translating evidence-based interventions into high-quality or high-impact practices *(Bickman et al., 2009; Carroll et al., 2001; Zilvinskis, 2017)* that can be implemented with high quality to scale.

Implementation fidelity is particularly useful for CEPs because it has the potential to uncover the extent to which best practices were executed; to identify gaps (i.e., steps or characteristics, such as reflection, that were not addressed) when implementing an intervention; and to address inconsistencies or examine variations across contexts, stakeholders, populations, and so on. Luckily, tools have been developed to help design these interventions and also evaluate the levels of fidelity for certain interventions that are community-based or community-engaged. Examples include *IUPUI Taxonomy for Service Learning Courses (Hahn, Hatcher, Price, & Studer, 2016)*, "PRELOAD" *(Kieran & Haack, 2018)*, and *Implementation Fidelity in Community-based Interventions (Breitenstein et al., 2010)*.

Regardless of the growing popularity of one type of evaluation (implementation fidelity), CEPs would benefit from learning about community-based or community-engaged methodologies for conducting evaluations because they align well with the "critical commitments" *(Dostilio et al., 2017)* of our work: inclusion, voice, mutually beneficial outcomes, reciprocity, and engaging community as competent colleagues in the creation of knowledge *(Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen, 2011)*. For example, extension officers, faculty members, and some staff within higher education organizations are required (by funders or other stakeholders) to conduct evaluations of their community-based programs and may utilize a participatory-based evaluation methodology. Other valuable resources for CEPs include professional associations such as the American Evaluation Association (AEA) and Better Evaluation, literature on participatory evaluation methods or values, and the professional competencies developed for evaluators broadly (e.g., *Galport & Azzam, 2017; King & Stevahn, 2015*; also see the American Evaluation Association's competencies available at *https://www.eval.org/page/competencies*).

Activity: Research

The final area of inquiry that CEPs may conduct is research. For the purposes of outlining this activity for CEPs, we highlight

and distinguish between three types of research: engaged scholarship, scholarship of engagement, and institutional research. The first of these buckets, engaged scholarship, is defined as a form of collaborative inquiry between academics and the community that leverages their diverse perspectives to generate knowledge *(Benson, Harkavy, & Puckett, 2007)*. In this case, scholars employ community-engaged methodologies that value the community as coinvestigator, and the purpose of conducting research is to address issues of common concern. In the second, the scholarship of engagement goes beyond research to include the scholarship of teaching, application, and integration *(Boyer, 1990, 1996)*. For many CEPs, the purpose of the scholarship of engagement is to contribute to the field of community engagement, which may not necessarily use community-engaged methodologies. Finally, CEPs must have some level of competency for institutional research, which is research conducted within an institution of higher education to provide information that supports institutional planning, policy formation, and decision making about key institutional-based initiatives and goals *(Howard, McLaughlin, & McKnight, 2012;* see also the *Association for Institutional Research, https://www.airweb.org/)*.

Regardless of whether CEPs identify as engaged scholars or categorize their work as scholarship of engagement, the evolving role of CEPs to advance the public mission of the institution and the institutionalization of community engagement requires us to examine institutional systems, policies, and goals (i.e., institutional research questions). We urge CEPs to continue to find time to conduct any one—or more—of these types of research, but certainly the one most lacking in outputs (i.e., published reports or research articles) is robust institutional research studies on community engagement in higher education. In order to stay abreast of the latest published practices and outputs from institutional research colleagues, we highly encourage CEPs and other constituents to check out the *Journal of Higher Education* or *New Directions in Institutional Research*, as well as other resources from these colleagues *(see https://www.airweb.org/collaborate-learn/reports-publications/journals-journal-news)*. These three categories for the activity of research are introduced here in a fundamental way, but they are worth much more attention and discussion among CEPs.

In summary, our desire to understand how community engagement leads to a variety of outcomes, including how we are fulfilling our institutional mission(s), requires systematic and systemic inquiry activities, such as those listed above. Although the field lacks a full determination of whether the investments in inquiry

and its related activities are worthwhile, we remain optimistic that the pressures of accountability, as previously mentioned, will lead to deeper and more meaningful lines of inquiry and can help transform our institutions. Finally, in the next section, we articulate why activities of inquiry are absolutely necessary in order for CEPs to lead change in higher education and advance the public missions of our institutions.

Inquiry and the CEP's Role in Organizational Learning

In this section we frame inquiry as essential to organizational learning and, therefore, to institutionalizing community engagement and leading change in higher education. Inquiry is notably important for CEPs as reflexive practitioners *(Schön, 1996)*, but for the sake of space we focus on the role of inquiry in organizational learning. The literature on organizational learning is useful here because it frames inquiry as "improvement-focused," which reemphasizes the primary purpose of inquiry: to transform, strengthen, and better our institutions, communities, and the human experience *(Darwin, 1953/2009; Susman & Evered, 1978; Tandon, 1989)*.

Since the 20th century, organizations have faced a "learning imperative" *(Argyris & Schön, 1996, p. xvii)*. This learning imperative requires that organizational members become perpetual learners *(Senge, 2006)* who continuously develop and refine knowledge relevant to improving individual, program- or group-based, and institutionalized practices and policies. It is also imperative that CEPs, as organizational learners and actors, use this information to determine how to effectively or efficiently achieve the public mission(s) of the organization. Unfortunately, the prevailing system of management in many organizations is unequipped to deliver the necessary, continuous learning required for meaningful and effective institutional learning or change *(Senge, 2006)*. Too many organizations are constrained by persistent habits, traits, or structures left over from the industrial era that do not encourage learning: hierarchy, functional separation, bureaucratic policies, and a focus on managerial control and stability *(Preskill & Torres, 1999)*. In contrast, our current knowledge era favors "(a) radical decentralization, (b) intense interdependence, (c) higher expectations, (d) transparent performance standards, (e) distributed leadership, and (f) networking and reciprocity" *(Preskill & Torres, 1999, p. 10)*. According to Senge *(2006)*, we must find ways for our organizations to become "more complex and dynamic . . . work must become more 'learningful.' . . . The organizations that truly excel in the future will be the

organizations that discover how to tap people's commitment and capacity to learn at all levels in an organization" *(p. 4)*.

Here the theories of organizational learning emphasize the importance of investigating and institutionalizing learning across multiple levels of the organization, from individual to group to organization *(Senge, 2006)*. Following sociologists Burrell and Morgan *(as cited in Jenlink, 1994)*, an organization can be characterized as "a network of intersubjectively shared meanings that are sustained through the development and use of a common language and everyday social interactions" *(p. 320)*. In Argyris and Schön's *(1996)* terms, an organization represents knowledge, or specifically a collective theory-in-use, that is reciprocally related to the individual theories-in-use of its members. The organization's theory-in-use is observed as the organization's routines and practices, such as concrete decision-making procedures and roles delegated with authority and power. Organizations are thus environments that structure individual thinking, action, and learning. *Organizational* or *institutional* inquiry requires that individuals inquire on behalf of the organization, in accordance with its prevailing roles and values. In turn, organizational learning provides opportunities for changing or informing the organization's theory-in-use— usually evidenced by shifts in aggregate patterns of thinking, behaving, or knowing across its individual members and groups. In sum, "organizational action cannot be reduced to the action of individuals . . . yet there is no organization action without individual action" *(Argyris & Schön, 1996, p. 8)*, and therefore organizational learning cannot happen without the three levels—individual, group, and organization—to develop, retain, and transfer knowledge within an organization.

The factors that hinder organizational learning broadly are the same two greatest challenges facing inquiry about community engagement practices in higher education: a hierarchical infrastructure and higher education's decentralized nature. Both factors yield suboptimal support for CEPs seeking to take the role of "knowledge worker" *(Ducker, 1959)*. However, the literature on institutionalizing community engagement does suggest that an entity providing some degree of coordination must exist (e.g., center, office, or committee; *Furco, 1999; Gelmon, Seifer, Kauper-Brown, & Mikkelsen, 2005; Holland, 1997, 2009; Welch & Saltmarsh, 2013*). Additionally, Gelmon et al. *(2005)* note in their self-assessment tool that community engagement must be intentionally connected to other structures, constituents, and policy-making entities (e.g., board of trustees, faculty senate), thereby working effectively across

the decentralized nature of the organization. We believe, however, that in order for CEPs to be successful knowledge workers for organizational learning, they need more than infrastructure and connections to other stakeholders across the institution. They need an inquiry-based approach to their decision support or knowledge worker role.

In order to illustrate how to think about the levels of organizational learning—individual, group, and organization—we have taken on two activities for the sake of this essay, which we will briefly introduce here. First we looked at the six areas of competence included within Dostilio et al.'s preliminary competency model for community engagement professionals *(2017)*. Using the literature from organizational learning that distinguishes between organizational and individual-level or group-level learning *(Senge, 2006)*, we found that two areas—leading change in higher education and institutionalizing community engagement on campus—require organizational-level inquiry processes, procedures, and activities, whereas the others involve group and/or individual levels of inquiry activities to inform and beget learning. The group level of learning means working with others to create new knowledge about community engagement practices. Group-level learning is, in fact, an essential and crucial task of the CEP because, according to Senge *(2006)*, teams and not individuals are "the fundamental learning unit" of an organization and "unless teams can learn, the organization cannot learn" *(p. 10)*. We believe that mapping out the broad areas of CEP competencies to levels of organizational learning provides CEPs a coherent learning and knowledge management strategy that informs inquiry activities.

Next, we conducted a basic content analysis of accreditation guidelines for programs of study (e.g., the Association of Theological Schools, which accredits programs related to master of divinity, master of arts in Christian ministry, etc.) to identify terms used to describe civic learning outcomes (CLOs). We focused on CLOs because they are the broad, transdisciplinary outcomes associated with service-learning *(Bringle & Hatcher, 1996)* Civic learning outcomes can be understood in terms of two key aspects: (1) they are transdisciplinary because they represent outcomes beyond any single discipline or program of study *(Mitchell, 2005)* (2) they are the knowledge, skills, attitudes, or abilities any human being needs to possess for "the creation of a freer and more humane experience in which we all share and to which we all contribute" *(Dewey, 1976, p. 230)*. Examples of broad civic learning goals include civic literacy, civic identity, civic agency or efficacy, and civic-mindedness.

Inquiry related to CLOs is prevalent in the literature of community engagement, but an examination of both transdisciplinary and civic language used within disciplinary-based accreditation revealed something different (see Figure 1). Results of the content analysis illustrate some of the challenges that CEPs face when working across the institution: The word *civic* never appeared in any of the guidelines.

Figure 1. Terminology Within Disciplinary Accreditation Guidelines

The lack of common CLOs from across accreditation bodies illustrates how CEPs must be aware of jargon in the field of community engagement and be able to code-switch back and forth between the field's language and the language that is most familiar within others' disciplines. Consequently, when working across campus (organizational-level learning), our language and inquiry practices need to support *any* discipline (i.e., any epistemological, ontological, and axiological assumptions at the individual level or group level) when, for accreditation purposes, CEPs seek evidence for factors such as ethical or moral reasoning, contributing to a healthy society, intercultural awareness, or instilling a commitment to public service. We note this because not only does code-switching become necessary within organizational learning, but the activities of inquiry also require shared terminology and shared definitions or understandings (e.g., inclusion/exclusion criteria), and both of these achievements become more challenging when the goal is organizational learning.

Being an inquiring CEP is, consequently, about acknowledging and framing our role as a particular kind of knowledge worker *(Ducker, 1959)* in higher education: a worker who can proactively shape the organization's environment for organizational learning in order to foster commitments to systems thinking, cultural diversity, full communication, pragmatic inquiry, learning to learn, and democratic change for our higher education institutions. CEPs are vital to creating or sustaining a culture that enables organizational learning and the dissemination of that knowledge with constituents, particularly decision makers across our communities and our higher education institutions.

Tensions and Future Directions for Inquiring CEPs

In this section we outline three major tensions that the authors have personally struggled with as they bridge the worlds of community engagement and inquiry. Working with diverse others is a core value of democratic engagement. The tensions we have identified suggest that working with diverse others around inquiry is nuanced. We close with recommendations for CEPs who wish to commit to their role in inquiry, organizational learning, or systematic processes for decision making around community engagement initiatives, practices, or goals.

Tension: Working Across Differences

From our lived experiences, community engagement and inquiry professionals offer amazing potential to inform each other's work, but we may approach the work differently. The best way to describe these differences is by examining the axiological, ontological, and epistemological approaches, ascertaining how they differ between CEPs and other inquiry professionals and knowledge workers in higher education (e.g., accreditation staff or officers, directors of institutional effectiveness or institutional research and decisions support, or those in strategic planning offices and similar). To further articulate these differences, we reference the adaptation of Alkin and Christie's *(2004)* metaphor of "The Evaluation Tree" by Mertens and Wilson *(2018)*. Table 1 illustrates how one's approach to inquiry differs based on those axiological, epistemological, and ontological assumptions.

In order to execute any form of inquiry for organizational learning, individuals have to work with others across campus *(Fulcher, Good, Coleman, & Smith, 2014)*, and this is absolutely true for CEPs, given job descriptions and competing priorities for time and other resources. However, the values and critical commitments of CEPs can be at odds with the assumptions and backgrounds of our colleagues who are also knowledge workers from across the institution. The preliminary competency model for CEPs *(Dostilio et al., 2017)* describes what CEPs need to do—for example, "work with rather than against administration," "manage conflict," or "unveil and disrupt unequal power structures" *(pp. 46–51)*—but understanding the sources of potential tensions (via the assumptions outlined in Table 1) is helpful when working with others. Additionally from the preliminary competency model, CEPs need to "advocate for community engagement and communicate its value" and "advocate for the development of policies that support community engagement" *(pp. 46–51)*. To be successful in this way, CEPs that engage and report on inquiry projects for improvement purposes must provide evidence-based information to support recommendations.

In summary, we recommend CEPs reflect upon Table 1 as they consider who they need to work with now and in the future from across their institution to advance the public mission of higher education. The tensions that come with "working with others" mean that CEPs must consider and balance the potential assumptions, values, use-theories or priorities, and methodological preferences because they will hinder or contribute to their collaboration with

Table 1. Assumptions and Approaches to Inquiry

	Methods (Postpositivist)	Values (Constructivist)	Use (Pragmatic)
Description	Focuses primarily on quantitative designs and data	Focuses primarily on identifying multiple values and perspectives through qualitative methods	Scientific method is insufficient to discover truth; use common sense and practical thinking
Axiological assumptions	Respect, Justice, Beneficence	Evaluator aware of own values and those of others	Gain knowledge in pursuit of desired ends as influenced by the evaluator's values and politics
Ontological assumption (reality)	One reality knowable within a certain level of probability	Multiple, socially constructed realities	There is a single reality, and all individuals have their own unique inter-pretation of reality
Epistemological assumption	Distant, Objective	Meaningful dia-logue and reflec-tion to create knowledge	Relationships in evalu-ation are determined by what the evaluator deems as appropriate to that particular study
Methodological assumption	Scientific method, hypothesis, quantitative methods	Qualitative, but quantitative too; Participatory	Match methods to specific questions and purposes of research; mixed methods can be used as evaluators facilitate work back and forth between various approaches
Theorists	Tyler, Campbell, Cook, Shadish, Boruch, Cronbach	House, Scriven, Stake, Guba, Lincoln, Eisner	Stufflebeam, Weiss, Wholey, Patton, Preskill, Alkin

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others who are essential for supporting inquiry activities and for informing organizational learning.

Tension: Inquiry for What? Improvement or Public Relations and Marketing

Marketing and communications seem to be higher education's response to the lack of trust in higher education and the need to demonstrate our value to society *(Jankowski et al., 2018; Kezar,*

Chambers, & Burkhardt, 2005). The good news is that community engagement is a big part of the story that many campuses are interested in telling. In a recent study of community-engaged researchers *(Norris, Weiss, Wendling, & Besing, 2018)*, subjects indicated that their work is valued rhetorically and that their campus uses it when marketing the department, school, or institution. Similarly, CEPs are under increasing pressure to develop and track metrics of engagement (e.g., number of community-engaged courses, number of students, number of hours, number of community partners, number of faculty, percentage of faculty living in the county, number of faculty receiving awards, percentage of students enrolled from local communities, percentage of goods and services purchased locally) to be used in infographics and other communication media such as websites, billboards, and brochures.

Through these media the glamorous numbers ("Over one million hours served which has an estimated economic impact of over $2.6 billion for our community partners") and persuasive messages from community engagement initiatives (Student A stated, "If it weren't for my time working with ABC Organization, I would never have learned as much about our homeless neighbors and how we can work together to change their lived experience in our community") are shared and utilized to form a narrative of your campus's unique flavor of community engagement. But is that reason enough to perform inquiry, or should it be the primary reason to pursue inquiry activities? We extrapolate on these rhetorical questions below by focusing on (1) utilizing data or information from inquiry activities for communicating and marketing the outputs and persuasive stories of community engagement and (2) the inherent dilemma of situating inquiry on community engagement initiatives within the institution.

Within the first tension, we acknowledge that when CEPs are asked to provide numbers for communication purposes it is, overall, a good thing. It is a signal that the institution values community engagement, and it gives the CEP a sense that the institution needs community engagement staff for these purposes; CEPs offer something that no one else on campus can provide. As an example, Carnegie's Elective Classification for Community Engagement requires institutions to offer examples of how community engagement is included in messaging, further confirming our role in marketing and communications. And yes, if CEPs are not being asked for information for these purposes, there is cause for concern.

From an inquiry perspective, the purpose of utilizing inquiry of community engagement for marketing and communications is not, however, without serious tensions. CEPs who seek to improve practices and institutionalize community engagement should recognize how this purpose could raise some red flags about an inherent bias in the inquiry activities. In order to prioritize improvement-focused inquiry, we therefore provide CEPs two standards to keep in mind when vetting or planning inquiry activities on community engagement.

First, CEPs must advocate for rigorous and systematic inquiry both within our field and when crossing boundaries into others. As scholars who disseminate findings, provide definitions, outline the methodology, explain decisions made along the way using theory based in the literature, identify limitations, and so on, it is in our interest to address standards of rigor. However, when findings are used solely for communications and marketing purposes, the potential for organizational learning is obscured. For example, numbers within an infographic are not indicators of quality—they are in fact just numbers. Among the potential ramifications of reporting community engagement outputs only for public relations purposes is the risk of delegitimizing the work and, worse yet, opening it up for misinterpretation.

Furthermore, public relations media do not always offer enough space to communicate context or the place-based nature of the work, which hinders the important work of telling the story from the community's perspective. As CEPs we have a responsibility to gather claims or statements of impact that (re)position the university as a contributor *with* community. We must, therefore, continuously contextualize the data or inquiry activities, a goal that also relates to the second major tension in this area.

The second tension that we face with regard to inquiry on community engagement when it comes to the particular area of communications and marketing relates to power and decision making or authority. The role that CEPs play in marketing and communications can come into conflict with such critical commitments as "challenge problematic language use that is paternalistic, dehumanizing, or oppressive" *(Dostilio et al., 2017, pp. 46–51)*. We recognize that to take on inquiry activities in the ways we have outlined is to frame them as institutionally focused. By situating them in this way, it immediately centers the inquiry activities on the institution, college, or campus, not on community—it does not frame inquiry as being *with* the community. It is hard to navigate the structural constraints of the university and the role that we play in providing

data to strengthen institutional support and improvement because the stories we are telling may not be in alignment with our critical commitments. For example, when the campus compiles a list of community partners, who makes decisions about definitions or methodologies (e.g., inclusion/exclusion criteria)? In other words, who determines what constitutes a "partner"? If we rely upon faculty and staff to provide the names of community partners, do we ever consider whether the community organization sees themselves as a "partner"? In this way, if we do not find a way to honor or center our community partners in the inquiry process, then we will not be honoring the critical commitments of our field. It is the same when it comes to communicating the metrics or persuasive messages of community engagement: We must center *with* community and not on how the institution's community engagement had an impact *on* community (its people, problems, issues, assets, organizations, etc.).

Our reflections on these tensions between inquiry and communications, public relations, or recognition have led to two recommendations for consideration. First, campuses should invest in more full-time positions related to inquiry activities within the organizational structure of community engagement (see IUPUI, University of Louisville, Virginia Commonwealth University, Washington University in St. Louis, Stanford University, University of Notre Dame, or Indiana Campus Compact). Staff in these roles will be vital to the implementation of IT platforms used for tracking and monitoring and should have a strong relationship to others on campus who have access to data or manage other data collection processes (e.g., faculty annual reporting).

Second, the need for marketing and managing public perception cannot be ignored, so we recommend being a more active participant. We encourage CEPs to be more proactive by feeding stories to communications and marketing staff—stories that offer the communities' perspectives and send a message that the university is a reciprocal partner. And when we are asked to provide numbers, CEPs should seek clarifying information and offer limitations and caution constituents about misinterpretations. To honor the rigorous research design, we recommend documenting the methodology and findings using an open-source platform (e.g., ScholarWorks) so that when possible, the numbers can be referenced back to an online source and provide a link to or record of the organization's learning over time.

Tension: Tracking Everything While Acknowledging the Horizon Event

We offered an example earlier in this essay regarding language used by accreditation bodies for programs of study or disciplines. The diversity of terms used to refer to transdisciplinary civic learning outcomes is problematic for the activities and roles of inquiry because, as we stated above, CEPs have to find a way to communicate across a variety of disciplinary-based backgrounds that come with their own terminology and guiding theories. In practice, these differences mean that we must engage in inquiry activities (specifically, tracking and monitoring) that are inclusive of all the different manifestations of campus–community engagement (e.g., community engagement, outreach, service, citizen science, applied research, service-learning, participatory research, public scholarship) for inquiry purposes. For example, if the goal of tracking and monitoring is to learn about "everything" that is happening, we should not seek to judge the quality, categorize, or define it—not yet, anyway. Because tracking and monitoring require us to have a "catch-all" approach, we must utilize other inquiry activities to keep up with the demands of our theories, values, and practices surrounding this work, namely "democratic engagement" as outlined by Saltmarsh, Hartley, and Clayton *(2009)*. In other words, CEPs can and should (through tracking and monitoring) cast a wide net and then go through robust inquiry activities (assessment, evaluation, or research) to ask questions regarding how any of those initiatives meet the elements of our horizon event: democratic engagement.

CEPs will encounter similar challenges when working to develop outcomes for community engagement *(Kezar, 2002)*. Most campuses are merely capturing outputs (e.g., number of courses, number of students, number of hours) and perhaps the impact of service-learning on student learning and success. However, there is a growing trend to measure other outcomes and impacts *(Norris & Weiss, in press)*. This is challenging because most campuses do not have the systems and processes in place for robust tracking and monitoring. However, with time, talent, resources, and a commitment to develop robust tracking and monitoring, CEPs can take an inquiry-based approach to articulating diverse and applicable outcomes. The future of higher education depends on our community engagement practices and programs, but just having these things (i.e., counting how many service-learning courses were offered) is not sufficient and may be doing more harm than good. However, by engaging in all of the inquiry activities we have outlined above,

CEPs can provide compelling evidence of higher education's value to and contribution with our communities and society.

Closing Thoughts

In summary, our purpose here was to illustrate the role of inquiry for CEPs. As we have outlined here, inquiry involves multiple tasks: tracking, monitoring, evaluation, assessment, and research. Further, we have articulated how CEPs' inquiry activities can contribute to and build capacity for learning at the individual level and group level, as well as how inquiry is essential for organizational-level learning and change. Finally, there is not a critical mass of CEPs who have roles primarily focused on inquiry activities or have the capacity to facilitate the systematic inquiry practices necessary for being a knowledge worker for organizational learning. In regard to being systematic, there are plenty of internal and external pressures that emphasize "systematic" as an essential component of measuring the performance of our institutions (e.g., accreditation requirements, Carnegie's Elective Community Engagement application, campus strategic plan metrics, and implementing campus-level or system-level IT platforms). We encourage campuses to develop a plan for systematic inquiry on community engagement that aligns with institutional plans, priorities, or mission(s) and demonstrates a need for more CEPs with explicit responsibilities related to inquiry on community engagement.

We offer the following recommendations for not only developing systematic inquiry processes, but also for being or becoming a CEP who is a key knowledge worker for organizational learning:

- *Develop a long-term plan for inquiry.* Consider your campus strategic plan goals, the Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement requirements, accreditation needs, community priorities, and campus context. Invest in data collection that leverages existing systems and processes while also allowing you to supplement your tracking and monitoring to explore the deeper, more meaningful questions that will lead to evidence that supports changes in policies, programs, and practices *(Norris, Wendling, & Keen, 2017).*

- *Build cross-campus partnerships.* Identify those across campus responsible for achieving campus goals (e.g., research and creative activity, global learning, faculty and staff development, economic and community develop-

ment, enrollment management) and learn what their priorities are, what data they are collecting, and how you can work together to achieve common goals.

- *Build your capacity for inquiry.* Community engagement conferences, although welcoming and helpful, are not enough to develop one's capacity for inquiry. Look for workshops and conferences that your assessment or institutional research faculty/staff attend. Websites for the following organizations are a good place to start: Association for Institutional Research (AIR), Assessment Institute, Association for the Assessment of Learning in Higher Education, National Institute for Learning Outcomes and Assessment (NILOA), Indiana Campus Compact's BPACE program.

- *(Re)Consider your audience(s).* Develop a communications plan and reconsider who needs information from you, what type of information is appropriate, and how to best provide that information. Do you need a formal annual report? If you want to change policies, programs, or practices, what evidence do you need to support your case? Who needs to know? What is the best way to communicate with them? Is your current inquiry leading to better practice?

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About the Authors

H. Anne Weiss is the director of assessment for Indiana Campus Compact, and a doctoral candidate at Indiana University. Her research interests center on the connections between institutional, student, and community success. She received her M.A. in applied communication from Indiana University.

Kristin E. Norris is the director of assessment for the Office of Community Engagement at IUPUI. Her research and professional interest include working with stakeholders (internal and external) to track community-engaged activities in order to conduct assessment, evaluation, and research that transforms higher education and demonstrates how IUPUI's community-engaged activities (e.g., programs, pedagogies, research, initiatives) support the institutional mission, demonstrate progress toward the strategic plan, and inform decision making. She received her Ph.D. in education administration from Indiana University.

Cooperative Extension Competencies for the Community Engagement Professional

Jorge Horacio Atiles

Abstract

The community engagement professional (CEP) plays a critical role in engaging faculty, staff, and students with communities. In order to do this in the most effective way, this essay advocates for CEPs to become familiar with the Cooperative Extension system and develop competency for engaging Extension personnel, even when those personnel are not a part of the CEP's home institution. The essay extends the work of Dostilio et al. *(2017)* on preliminary competencies for the community engagement professional by identifying additional competencies, organized as knowledge, skill, and dispositions, that can help CEPs work with the Cooperative Extension system to maximize engagement opportunities for faculty, staff, and students. This essay also includes ideas for implementing competency training for CEPs. Conclusions include thoughts on preparing the community engagement professional to learn and collaborate with Cooperative Extension to enrich the academic experience and benefit the communities they serve.
Keywords: cooperative extension, competencies, community engagement professional

Introduction

*T*his reflective essay addresses a gap in the literature regarding competencies needed for the community engagement professional (CEP) to work with the Cooperative Extension Service system to maximize community engagement opportunities for faculty, staff, and students. Dostilio *(2017)* defined the community engagement professional as one with formal administrative responsibilities who supports and fosters community engagement within higher education.

Dostilio et al. *(2017)* developed a preliminary competency model for CEPs. The model as presented was intended to be a dynamic model that would grow over time. In creating this model, they did not address the CEP relationship to Cooperative Extension, an important community engagement resource across many institutions of higher education in the nation. Likewise, previous research on CEP competencies *(Burkard, Cole, Ott, & Stoflet,*

2005) did not include competencies needed to collaborate and coordinate engagement efforts with Cooperative Extension.

Many CEPs may not be located at a state land-grant university, and thus they may not be aware of Extension. In such circumstances, they may not take full advantage of Extension as a community engagement resource that could be available to them. However, this should not be an impediment to seeking collaboration with Cooperative Extension faculty, county educators, and others, as this system was created to serve all people. Further, at many universities where Extension is present, there are CEPs working in campus-based positions who rarely seek collaboration with their Extension colleagues. In this essay, the proposed new competencies should enhance the work and influence of CEPs by advancing their collaboration with the Cooperative Extension Service system, especially at a time, as suggested by Welch and Saltmarsh *(2013)*, when CEPs are part of a second generation focused on civic engagement concerns across multiple functions of a university. As the field of engaged scholarship has evolved since the time of *Returning to Our Roots: The Engaged Institution (Kellogg Commission, 1999)*, a contemporary and updated set of competencies would add skills and abilities to CEPs working with the Cooperative Extension system across the nation.

Cooperative Extension

Since its creation with the Smith-Lever Act of 1914, the Cooperative Extension Service system has been the largest arm of engagement, service, and outreach for the land-grant public university system in the United States. Cooperative Extension is a complex infrastructure that involves federal, state, and local governments in its funding and implementation. Among its unique characteristics, Cooperative Extension represents the land-grant university's presence in every county or parish in the country and its territories. Consequently, this widespread presence and influence is a critical resource for any CEP to understand in order to maximize the beneficial effects of their university's community engagement. Furthermore, mastering the complexities and modus operandi of the Cooperative Extension infrastructure will enable CEPs to better influence the university's community engagement infrastructure for engaged teaching, service, and research activities. Bridging any gaps between these infrastructures would most likely improve the work of the CEPs as well as the faculty, staff, and students they support.

Across the nation, various state-level Cooperative Extension Services have worked toward instituting competency-based education for their Extension educators, administrators, volunteers, and facilitators, among others. In fact, eXtension (the national online platform for Cooperative Extension) has done significant work with Eduworks to incorporate a competency-based framework development that aims at the pursuit of terminal learning objectives *(eXtension, 2016)*. Others, such as the North Carolina State University Cooperative Extension and the Texas A & M Agrilife Extension, have focused on competencies that help Extension professionals apply skills, knowledge, and attitudes in seeking excellence in the workplace *(Liles and Mustian, 2004)*.

In the case of Texas A & M Agrilife Extension *(2018)*, the competencies were grouped within the following categories for each of their education program areas: technical, organizational effectiveness, personal effectiveness, action-orientation, communication, and development of others. In this example, there is an opportunity to add a community-engagement competency category that focuses on how to engage in mutually beneficial collaborations and partnerships. This competency is often overlooked in Extension training, in part because in the last 100 years of Cooperative Extension work, educators have implicitly practiced community-engaged work from community-based locations throughout the counties. Articulating these competencies for the CEP and eventually for the Extension professional will ensure that a robust implementation of engagement practices is included at the university level.

Applying Extension Competencies to CEPs

The Dostilio et al. *(2017)* model identifies six major themes, which include requisite areas of knowledge, skill, ability, and dispositions. This essay suggests an additional area of competence—working with a state's Cooperative Extension Service—and offers corresponding knowledge, skills, dispositions, and overall critical commitments for inclusion in the existing CEP model. In fact, the resources, relationships, and long history of Cooperative Extension will help further the community engagement goals of a university. Please note that this essay proposes these competencies for community engagement professionals in a university context. Therefore, it may also include CEPs employed by Cooperative Extension. It is important to note that a county Extension professional often serves in a dual role of educator or faculty and local administrator of programs focusing on how to engage with the community. Given

Extension's presence in every county in the nation and its territories and its long history in higher education, the adaptation of the Dostilio model to include Extension-related competencies will enhance the menu of skills available to CEPs, especially those who work at land-grant universities. Likewise, this competency could be helpful to CEPs working in other public and private universities that are adapting the "Extension" model to their community engagement practices and context.

In order to build Cooperative Extension competencies for CEPs, the author reviewed existing literature. Reviewing the competencies for Extension professionals served to identify those competencies that appear helpful to a campus-based community engagement professional. The goal is not to identify new competencies for Extension, although another study should look at how the current Extension competencies should promote efficient and sustainable university–community engagement.

The competencies already developed for Extension professionals uniquely address competencies needed to work effectively in off-campus contexts such as international and community or county settings. By bringing the competencies for Extension personnel into conversation with those identified for CEPs, we can enhance the existing CEP competency model in two ways: strengthening a CEP's ability to collaborate with Extension personnel and more specifically attending to the competencies necessary to work in noncampus contexts. The next two sections describe the insights gained by examining Extension competencies in (1) an international context and (2) a community-based context. Each section identifies areas of overlap and departure between the practice of Extension and what is identified in the CEP competency model *(Dostilio et al., 2017)*.

Extension competencies in an international context. In the case of Extension competencies at the international level, Suvedi and Ghimire *(2015)* reviewed literature relevant to what agricultural Extension professionals are expected to do in order to ensure that their services are sustainable. In their thematic brief, the authors emphasized the need for Extension to follow a farmer-centered approach (demand driven); to encourage active participation of farmers and stakeholders (participatory); and involve nongovernmental agencies and cooperatives as Extension service providers (pluralistic). Those three approaches are clearly oriented toward a community-engaged practice. Furthermore, they recommend the following core competencies to be considered by devel-

oping nations in the training of their Extension professionals:

1. Program planning and implementation. An emphasis on learning to plan and facilitating their community partners to do the same. This is not included in the Dostilio et al. *(2017)* competencies model, but it could be included under Facilitating Faculty Development and Support.

2. Communication skills. Understand the process of diffusion of innovation to communicate effectively with partners. This is included in the Dostilio et al. *(2017)* model under Cultivating High-Quality Partnerships and is not included in the Extension competencies to avoid redundancy.

3. Leadership. Extension leaders must uphold their partners' and stakeholders' program participation and ownership. Dostilio et al. *(2017)* address this under Leading Change in Higher Education.

4. Education and information technology. Extension staff must be familiar with emerging information and communications technology. This is not included in the Dostilio et al. *(2017)* competencies model. However, because this competency is not particularly exclusive to Cooperative Extension, it would not be added as an Extension competency for CEP. Rather, it should be included under Facilitating Faculty Development and Support.

5. Diversity, pluralism, and multiculturalism. Understand and be familiar with the diversity of a community. This is not included in the Dostilio et al. *(2017)* competencies model and will be added as part of the Cooperative Extension competencies for CEP.

6. Professionalism. Integrity, honesty, transparency, and inclusiveness are traits that will serve CEPs well when engaging with their communities. This is indirectly included in the Dostilio et al. *(2017)* model under Knowledge of Self: Self-awareness.

7. Extension and organizational management. Mobilize, manage and monitor resources and processes to ensure effective delivery and successful outcomes. Not included in the Dostilio et al. *(2017)* model but added as part of the proposed Extension competencies.

8. Program evaluation and research. This is accountability or the understanding of what, where, how, and when Extension programs are delivered and their impact or

success. Suvedi and Ghimire *(2015)* argued that program evaluation is the most studied competency for Cooperative Extension professionals. This competency is already conceptually present in the Dostilio et al. *(2017)* model under Administering Community Engagement Programs.

9. Technical expertise. Extension personnel must have basic knowledge on the subject matters they teach. This competency is addressed several times in the Dostilio et al. *(2017)* model.

Overall, the competencies proposed by Suvedi and Ghimire *(2015)* promote the inclusion of stakeholders so they too develop their skills and competencies. Naturally, their main message is to prepare community partners to take ownership of their future. In a way, Extension does this when it helps develop the skills of Extension 4-H volunteers, Master Gardeners, and Master Family and Consumer Sciences volunteers. This level of inclusion of stakeholders in skills development is a valuable competency for the CEP.

Competencies for community-based Extension leaders. Another study, by Sobrero and Jayaratne *(2014)*, offered four constructs focused on changes to the New and Aspiring County Extension Director Leadership Institute program that provided county Extension directors with the leadership skills needed to facilitate the work of county educators engaging with communities. These are the four constructs that became the Institute's core principles and practices and can become part of the CEP competencies in Cooperative Extension:

1. Collaborative learning, teamwork, and community engagement leading to practice change. This competency is already part of the Leading Change within Higher Education section of the model developed by Dostilio et al. *(2017)*. The key component is the utilization of democratic strategies that are mutually beneficial with the goal of achieving a compromise on the design, delivery, and evaluation of an engagement activity or program. The role of a CEP is to understand and prepare those involved on how to use specific strategies, including technology.

2. Systems thinking and action. This competency would help CEPs understand the context of an issue, problem, or opportunity. It prepares them to utilize case studies, role-play, and simulations for onboarding or training programs

for faculty, staff, students, and community members alike. I propose an expanded scope of this competency by adding the knowledge and effective utilization of logic models that incorporate the systems that affect the issue, problem, or opportunity at hand. Engagement through Cooperative Extension benefits from logic modeling to determine the outcomes, outputs, and inputs that are of mutual interest to communities and universities. In this essay, this competency is added to the model of Cooperative Extension competencies for community engagement professionals.

3. Systematic evaluation. With this element (already included in the model by *Dostilio et al., 2017*), Sobrero and Jayaratne *(2014)* underscore the importance of outcomes. Any engagement activity should plan for these outcomes and document the changes that resulted from the activity for both the university and the community partners. This in turn informs the process and contributes to the improvement of the intervention or engaged practice.

4. Demonstrating scholarship through community engagement. This could be additional knowledge competency under the Administering Community Engagement Programs section of the Dostilio et al. *(2017)* model. Sobrero and Jayaratne *(2014)* argue that results of systematic evaluation, such as impacts and changes in the community and university players, may be an example of practice as a form of scholarship. A CEP would therefore need to be skilled at helping faculty, staff, and students prepare to plan and translate their work into scholarly outputs that inform the field of engagement and their disciplines. This would be an additional knowledge competency under the Administering Community Engagement Programs section of the Dostilio et al. *(2017)* model. Therefore, I will not be including this as a new CEP competency under Cooperative Extension but suggest that Dostilio et al. may consider expanding the knowledge and skills area of that competency in their model.

In order to minimize redundancies, only one CEP competency from the above four constructs will be added as new to the Dostilio et al. *(2017)* model: Systems Thinking, Logic Modeling, and Action. In addition to this competency, this essay includes three other Cooperative Extension competencies for CEPs:

1. Knowledge of opportunities that exist within Extension to collaborate with other faculty, staff, and students. These include, for example, access to needs assessment and knowledge for the issues that need addressing; source of internships and student experiences; and partnering for research and interventions, among others.

2. Knowledge of the relevance of diversity of partnering communities. Most Cooperative Extension Services work across a diversity of populations with various needs and aspirations. A CEP could collaborate with Extension in the implementation of intercultural competency training, development, and evaluation for staff, faculty, students, and community partners. In addition, cultural immersion programs are helpful in expanding cultural awareness and improved programming when engaging with diverse populations in the United States and abroad.

3. Understanding the Extension infrastructure and governance. This will help CEPs navigate and plan collaborations for engagement experiences.

Table 1 shows the four additional competencies proposed as a complement to those developed by Dostilio et al. *(2017)*. The remainder of this essay will focus on describing the essence of those four competencies and how they can operationalize in a higher education engagement setting.

Cooperative Extension Competencies for CEPs

These additional competencies promote the knowledge acquisition, skills development, and disposition awareness on the subject of Cooperative Extension. They can help CEPs learn how to incorporate Cooperative Extension into community-engaged work in higher education.

It is important to understand that the competencies included in Table 1 are complementary to those already included in the Dostilio et al. model *(2017)*, especially because several already included in the model are useful in working with the Cooperative Extension Service. The four areas of competencies in Table 1 address the gaps in Extension competencies for community-engaged professionals (CEPs).

Table 1. Additional CEP Competencies Related to Cooperative Extension

Area	Competencies			Critical commitments
	Knowledge	**Skills and abilities**	**Dispositions**	
Working with a state's Cooperative Extension Service	• Knowledge of opportunities within Cooperative Extension to collaborate • Knowledge of the relevance of diversity of partnering communities • Knowledge of Cooperative Extension's infrastructure, funding, and governance • Knowledge of systems thinking theory, logic modeling, and their application to engagement	• Able to cultivate collaborative activities between faculty, staff, students with Cooperative Extension • Able to train or administer intercultural competencies training and assist with individual development plans • Able to connect with Extension leaders, collaborate in funding, and appropriately use Extension infrastructure. • Able to take a comprehensive systems view to the issue that is the subject of the engaged partnership	• Embrace the Cooperative Extension infrastructure, regardless of whether the CEP is in a land-grant university or not • Embrace difference and use it constructively to foster engagement locally and globally • Embrace Cooperative Extension in the state and its long history in community engagement • Embrace systems thinking, logic models, and the ecological model	• Commitment to follow and contribute to critical discourse by enhancing the communication between Cooperative Extension and other campus units • Understand the power structures behind the diversity and implicit bias issues present in the community and the Extension system • Commit to social change and positive outcomes as part of the process and results of the engagement activity in partnership with Extension

Existing Opportunities Within Extension to Collaborate

Knowledge. Community engagement professionals can identify opportunities to collaborate with Cooperative Extension by seeking information regarding its key priorities and initiatives in the state. The best way to do this is by contacting the state's Extension director at a land-grant university in the state. Cooperative Extension utilizes various methods and processes to

gather input on the most critical needs of a state. It takes this valuable information and prepares a plan of work that proposes certain outputs and outcomes related to the needs that it has the capacity to address. This plan is often referred to as the Federal Plan of Work and is submitted to the National Institute for Food and Agriculture (NIFA) in the U.S. Department of Agriculture. NIFA is the federal home of the U.S. Cooperative Extension Service. Before it becomes a plan of work, Extension specialists (i.e., faculty with Cooperative Extension appointments) work with county Extension educators and others to develop an Extension education intervention. This intervention is grounded on needs assessments, the most relevant research-based practices, and new discoveries. The Extension intervention often takes the forms of curricula, fact sheets, field demonstrations, 4-H youth development events, and other educational resources to target specific populations with information that may lead to desired outputs and outcomes. More on this process is addressed later in this essay in the Systems Thinking, Logic Modeling, and Action knowledge competency.

The main goal of understanding the priorities and programs of Cooperative Extension is for a CEP to connect faculty, staff, and students across the university with Extension faculty and educators with similar interests. In addition to connecting, the CEP may be able to identify collaborative opportunities such as needs assessments, Extension research, fact sheets, and projects. Because Cooperative Extension may be a land-grant university's largest presence across the state, the CEP should always respect and maintain that local presence and always inform, seek out, and collaborate with local Extension educators or agents.

Skills and abilities. A CEP should be able to

1. identify and study the state's Cooperative Extension plan with its priorities and initiatives;
2. extract information about the populations Extension serves, the programs it offers, and the impacts and outcomes of its programs; and
3. identify Extension faculty on campus who may be interested in collaborating with others to address issues related to communities of mutual interest.

Dispositions. It is vital that CEPs adopt a mind-set of collaboration, ensuring that they seek to avail their work with all potential resources, including those offered by partnering with Extension.

The Relevance of Diversity of Partnering Communities

Knowledge. CEPs should acquire knowledge and understanding of how cultural diversity plays an important part in any successful university–community engagement effort. Respectful relationships that bring mutual benefit to a university and a community must include a level of competency around cultural differences and similarities. Although intercultural competencies are suggested for the CEP, it is important to acknowledge that universities also have a very different culture from communities. Therefore, communities should also acquire knowledge on how to navigate differences when working with university bureaucracies.

For decades, several land-grant universities and state Cooperative Extension services have invested resources in preparing their workforce to be more interculturally competent. These efforts also recognize the need to be self-aware and sensitive to how some communities may not embrace some scientific perspectives when arriving at conclusions about issues of mutual concern. For example, when studying the connection of diversity and science through cross-cultural engagement, Hassel *(2007)* concluded that cultural diversity brings great value to a university beyond political correctness in that it helps build knowledge about the world.

Skills and abilities. Community engagement professionals should be able to understand their own intercultural competencies as well as be ready to provide access to intercultural training to faculty, staff, students, and community members. This is especially helpful when engaging with communities via collaborations with their state's Cooperative Extension service. The CEP should be familiar with various options for intercultural competency training. For instance, several Cooperative Extension services have developed their own cultural training, such as Washington State University Extension's Navigating Difference: Cultural Competency Training *(Deen, Parker, Griner Hill, Huskey, & Whitehall, 2014).* This training, also used by Kansas State Research and Extension, focuses on evaluating short-term and long-term changes in knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs about cultural difference. The training is based on five cultural competencies: awareness, understanding, knowledge, interaction, and sensitivity. It is important to note that the rapid influx of immigrants to the United States of America in the late 1980s and 1990s challenged the Cooperative Extension system across the nation with the need to be ready to understand and work with these new Americans in rural and urban communities across many states.

Another approach is the one used by the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service *(Fabregas Janeiro & Atiles, 2015; Fabregas Janeiro, Martin, & Atiles, 2015)*, which implemented an intercultural competency training plan divided into the following four stages:

1. Conduct an intercultural competence assessment of personnel utilizing the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) developed by Bennett (1986). The work of Hammer (2009) and Hammer, Bennett, and Wiseman (2003) demonstrated that the IDI is a robust cross-cultural assessment instrument to build cultural competency. Their work effectively ties leadership excellence to the ability to be culturally competent. The IDI places respondents in one of the five stages of the intercultural development continuum: denial, polarization, minimization, acceptance, and adaptation.

2. Use the aggregate or group results of the IDI to develop a custom face-to-face intercultural training to offer personnel better tools and resources to engage with diverse communities.

3. Design an online training module on intercultural competencies to reinforce the face-to-face training.

4. Participate in Extension district meetings across the state to support the multicultural efforts of the county educators as they develop their own plans to move up in the intercultural development continuum.

In general, whichever training is chosen by a CEP, a training plan should be developed that involves several components of training to help the faculty, staff, students, and stakeholders grow more interculturally competent over time. A one-time intercultural training is not enough to achieve this.

Dispositions. The CEP must not shy away from diversity and difference. Through intercultural competency training, a CEP can develop a level of skills and comfort that will help in using cultural differences to foster successful domestic and international engagement.

Extension's Infrastructure, Funding, and Governance

Knowledge. The first step for a community engagement professional seeking to understand the opportunities to collaborate

with Cooperative Extension is learning about the origins and purpose of this system. A good place to start is by reviewing the history of Cooperative Extension and its relationship with land-grant universities and the people of a state (see *Atiles, Jenkins, Rayas-Duarte, Taylor, & Zhang, 2014*). Cooperative Extension is often divided into four nationally recognized program areas: agriculture and natural resources (ANR); family and consumer sciences (FCS); 4-H and youth development (4-H); and community and rural development (CRD). These program areas are supported by national program leaders housed in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Institute for Food and Agriculture (NIFA). At the state level, and in terms of governance, Cooperative Extension is managed by a state director and associate or assistant directors (who may also serve as state program leaders for ANR, FCS, 4-H, and CRD). These administrators are often located on the main campus of a land-grant university. Extension state specialists are also located on campus and in most cases are faculty in academic departments holding an Extension appointment. A state's Extension delivery infrastructure is often organized in regions or districts that oversee the administration of Extension educators or agents for each county or parish.

Cooperative Extension's funding is a true partnership between federal, state, and local governments. Each year following the passage of the bills that fund governments, USDA NIFA allocates funding for each state's Extension service. Similarly, state governments allocate funding to their state Cooperative Extension Service. Depending on the state, the funding may be allocated directly to Extension or indirectly through a board of regents for higher education or similar university governing entity. In the case of local governments, a county or parish may also allocate funding to operate the local county Extension office. These funds are normally used for maintenance and operations, travel and professional development, and some personnel costs. In some counties, a portion of the local sales tax may be dedicated to funding a local county Extension office.

Skills and abilities. The community engagement professional should be able to connect with Extension through a clear understanding of its governance, infrastructure, and funding. Know who should be contacted when a service-learning or engaged project is being proposed to take place in a county. Knowing where to start in the chain of Extension leadership will ensure a smooth collaborative effort and communication flow. Many times an engagement activity will benefit from collaboration with a local leader

or key informant. A local Extension educator will most likely be that leader or at least know whom the CEP should contact for the proposed engagement initiative.

Dispositions. Embracing Cooperative Extension as the longest tenured form of university engagement countywide, statewide, and nationwide is integral to creating successful community engagement opportunities for faculty, staff, and students. CEPs can build an engagement support system that takes advantage of this great resource in a mutually beneficial way.

Systems Thinking, Action, and Logic Modeling

Knowledge. The community engagement professional should be knowledgeable about systems theory and its application to engagement and Cooperative Extension. Briefly, systems theory or thinking refers to taking a holistic and interdisciplinary approach to understanding behaviors and problems within complex systems *(Bertalanffy, 1968)*. It is about taking into account interrelated and interdependent parts of a system. When engaging with a community, university actors should think about how the community and the university are part of a larger system. It helps the CEP and/or Extension educator plan for the intended and unintended effects that one action can have on other parts of a system, and it provides a base for a problem-solving model. Weber and Soderquist *(2016)* further discuss the value of systems thinking as a competency that is critical in identifying the high-advantage or high-leverage places to intervene. The goal is to help the community identify the changes to the system that it can afford to take and that will yield the most impactful outcomes.

Perhaps one of the best applications of systems thinking into effective engagement is the work done in Australia to create an engagement-planning workbook *(State of Victoria, 2015)*. The approach to creating this engagement workbook starts with an engagement-planning key. This key helps the CEP plan a strategy for individual learning during three major phases:

1. Scope. Determining the scope and type of engagement needed based on understanding the project's system and the people in the system.
2. Act. Planning the implementation of the project by describing what success will look like; determining which tools, schedules, and resources will be needed; and managing potential engagement risks.

3. Evaluate. Planning for resources and schedules required to collect the evidence that will show anticipated outcomes. This phase helps clarify what is the purpose of the evaluation and who wants to know what. This phase is particularly important, as both the community and the university must be part of the decision of what will be collected and evaluated.

At each of these three phases, the CEP is encouraged to stop and, together with the community, review, reflect, and celebrate. This is a way to refresh the engagement plan and account for emerging opportunities and risks.

Another approach that is widely used by the Cooperative Extension system is logic modeling *(McCawley, 2010; Taylor-Powell, Jones, & Henert, 2003)*. A CEP should learn how to use logic models to frame the anticipated outcomes, outputs, activities, and inputs of an engagement project. Extension professionals use logic models to plan, implement, and evaluate Extension education programs based on the desired outcomes for their target audiences. A CEP must understand where a proposed engagement activity fits in the relevant Extension logic model and how it can contribute to intended community outcomes. In addition, a CEP should also include desired outcomes for the students, staff, and/or faculty involved. For instance, a faculty member offering a service-learning course on a topic such as diabetes may be collaborating with a Cooperative Extension state specialist implementing the Dining with Diabetes program *(Michigan State University Extension, 2018)*. This is a program of national reach used by many states. In the effort to engage with Extension's reach to people living with or at risk of diabetes, the CEP should ensure that the faculty member considers the desired outcomes for the students and the community members engaged through this class. For instance, a participant in Dining with Diabetes provided testimony that "Since December, I lost 20 pounds and my A1C dropped from 8.9 to under 7. I feel much better and my doctor is ecstatic!" *(Michigan State University Extension Catalog, 2014, p. 51)*. This was clearly a desired outcome for the community participant. What, then, is the desired learning outcome for the students in the class? Among other potential student learning outcomes, the faculty member could expect that the student would reflect on the use of educational materials to promote behavioral change in diet and exercise.

Skills and abilities. The community engagement professional should be able to provide training to faculty, staff, students, and community members on logic modeling. The CEP can reach out to Extension personnel familiar with logic modeling, and they could collaborate in a systematic way to deliver training. This ability helps the CEP to assist faculty with using logic models to match research or teaching outcomes with instructional syllabi and research programs, grants, and evaluation tools. In sum, impact assessments of engaged teaching, research, and service activities are enhanced by the use of systems thinking and logic modeling.

Dispositions. Embracing systems thinking and logic modeling is essential for this competency to effect the desired results in enhancing university–community engagement. A CEP will benefit from employing systems thinking and logic modeling in the plans for the overall community engagement strategy for the campus. This will provide practice, expertise, and a larger context for desired outcomes and impacts for the campus and community.

Critical Commitments

Hernandez and Pasquesi *(2017)* provide an important view on critical principles versus competencies for CEPs. Briefly, they argue that the term *competency* is not adequate when used in the context of critical practice and engagement by CEPs. Their main concern is that *competency*, as a term, is not found in critical community engagement literature, and furthermore, it may imply that such universal skills are applicable to all situations or groups regardless of context. Ultimately, these authors advocate for CEPs' having a commitment to critical practice that promotes an engagement that helps faculty, students, and community members to dissect the meaning of social change, power, and authenticity.

Overall, working with a state's Cooperative Extension service is a winning competency for the community engagement professional and those he or she serves. Therefore, a CEP should be committed to a critical practice that includes the understanding of the opportunities, infrastructure, funding, governance, goals, and mission of Cooperative Extension. CEPs doing so need to be aware of acting within a context of discovery of the power structures and undue influences that a university could have when engaging with communities that may be disadvantaged or accustomed to being used by universities as "subjects" of their research. It is important to note that Cooperative Extension is a complex system with regard to its funding and the external powers that govern it. For instance,

local county or parish governments may have certain expectations of their local county Extension office, which may require Extension educators to expand their work beyond what the land-grant university expects of them. Similarly, the county educator must balance local needs, expressed by the communities they serve, with the needs of the university campus, the CEP, and the faculty involved in the community engagement activity. Therefore, a CEP should not make assumptions as to how much influence and power the university can have over the local Extension office since this is truly a collaboration between state and county partners.

Additionally, a clear understanding of the diversity of the populations and communities Extension serves will enhance the opportunities to engage together and build more meaningful engagement experiences. Without an understanding of the social identities and the asymmetrical power structures that are present in those communities, social change may not advance appropriately through the university–community engagement activity supported by the CEP. For this to happen, a CEP must believe in social change as one of the important goals of the engagement activity. Further work may be needed to tease out how social change can be measured in both the community and the university participants (critical consciousness, change advocacy, etc.). This is critical since any engagement activity should be closely tied to learning objectives that are consistent with the goals, for example, of a service-learning course or a research project.

A CEP should commit to being intentional in reaching out to Extension professionals to form a collaborative relationship that will yield better results for the community engagement activity, regardless of whether they are part of their campus or university. This takes a commitment to overcome communication barriers, whether real or perceived, between members of different groups, sometimes including competing universities. At the end, the CEP should be able to think big and aspire to help achieve long-term impactful outcomes and at the same time act small to help build long-lasting relationships with a community.

Extension Competencies Training for CEPs

The CEP competencies model by Dostilio et al. *(2017)* already includes Cultivating High-Quality Partnerships. Although not the goal of this essay, this competency would be a great addition for training Extension personnel. This will enhance the work done by Suvedi and Kaplowitz *(2016)* to create a core competency toolbox

for Extension staff, which includes communication skills and inclusion of community leaders. Extension competencies training for the community engagement professional might be implemented through a variety of efforts. Among these, university-sponsored engagement academies can include content related to Cooperative Extension in face-to-face education of professionals and practitioners. In addition, online core competencies in Cooperative Extension can be created and made available not only through the engagement academies but also through key organizations dedicated to furthering engagement, such as Campus Compact, the Engagement Scholarship Consortium (ESC), the Commission on Economic and Community Engagement (CECE) of the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU), and Imagining America.

Conclusion

This essay attempts to build upon a preliminary model for competencies for the community engagement professional in a university setting. After careful consideration, four new competencies were added to the Dostilio et al. *(2017)* model. The main takeaway of this essay is that the Dostilio model can be adapted and expanded to allow a CEP to be more competent in the opportunities provided by Cooperative Extension and for the Cooperative Extension professional to be more competent in community engagement as a whole. Not all CEPs may be interested in working with Cooperative Extension, but those who are will find the expanded Dostilio model helpful in navigating Extension's infrastructure, funding, and governance; its approach to systems thinking and logic modeling; and the intercultural and diversity aspects of the communities it serves. Moreover, these Extension-related competencies help the CEP develop a holistic approach to training on various skills and abilities for successful community engagement. In terms of critical commitments, this essay explored the complex structure behind Cooperative Extension and suggested that a CEP should commit to understating this as part of an effort to effect social change and positive outcomes for both the community and university participants.

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About the Author

Jorge Horacio Atiles coordinates the University Network on Community Engagement at Oklahoma State University and serves on the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities Commission on Economic and Community Engagement. In addition to community engagement, his research interests focus on housing policy, energy, water, waste, and environmental health. He received his Ph.D. in housing from Virginia Tech University.

RESEARCH ARTICLES

The Art of Convening: How Community Engagement Professionals Build Place-Based Community–University Partnerships for Systemic Change

Paul J. Kuttner, Kara Byrne, Kimberly Schmit, and Sarah Munro

Abstract

Over the past 50 years, colleges and universities have taken on increasingly important roles as anchor institutions in U.S. cities, partnering with local communities to promote development and well-being. Such community–campus partnerships rely on the work of community engagement professionals (CEPs), staff tasked with administering, coordinating, supporting, and leading engagement efforts at institutions of higher education. The preliminary competency model for community engagement professionals *(Dostilio et al., 2016)* lays out the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and commitments needed to perform this work. However, place-based approaches to engagement have been underrepresented in the emerging literature. The authors contribute to this conversation with a case study of partnership management work at University Neighborhood Partners at the University of Utah. Through this case, we highlight key competencies for engaging in place-based community development, suggest additional competency areas for the model, and explore how an understanding of CEP competencies is enriched and complicated by staff positionality.

Keywords: community engagement, partnerships, community engaged scholarship, community engagement professionals, higher education

Introduction

*I*n 2001, the University of Utah launched the West Side Initiative, a project that aimed to address barriers to higher education and build more equitable relationships with the city's west side neighborhoods. The initiative began with 9 months of individual and group interviews that engaged over 250 west side residents, organizational leaders, and other stakeholders, addressing their priorities, concerns, and visions for the neighborhoods. Using an asset-based community development approach *(Mathie & Cunningham, 2003)*, this research led to the design and launch of University Neighborhood Partners (UNP), a university

department with a mission to "bring together university and west side resources in reciprocal learning, action, and benefit—a community coming together." In response to resident demands, UNP located its offices off campus in a house within one of the west side neighborhoods. Over the next 15 years, UNP would play a key role in local community development efforts by convening resident leaders, university partners, and local organizations and institutions to address shared goals related to education, resident leadership, and community capacity and well-being.

By founding UNP, the University of Utah was responding to the stark inequities of its specific local context. It was also taking part in a growing movement to reinvigorate the public mission of higher education and to take responsibility for the vital role that colleges and universities can play as "anchor institutions" *(Hodges & Dubb, 2012)*. Responding to a number of different trends over the past half century—deindustrialization, globalization, neoliberalism, devolution of federal control—institutions of higher education have taken on increasingly important roles in U.S. cities as economic, cultural, and social forces. In many cases, institutions have sought to combine educational and research missions, economic priorities, and social goals by investing in local geographic areas and partnering with communities to promote community development *(Birch, Perry, & Taylor, 2013; Hodges & Dubb, 2012; Taylor & Luter, 2013)*.

Community engagement can involve a wide array of university actors. However, it usually relies on a backbone of university staff who are tasked with administering, coordinating, supporting, and leading engagement efforts, often as a part of a center or network of centers focused on community engagement *(Welch, 2016; Welch & Saltmarsh, 2013)*. In recent years, such staff have come to be known as *community engagement professionals* (CEPs). Within the large and growing literature on community engagement in higher education, relatively little focus has been given to this growing professional community, though in recent years there have been some efforts to better document the roles played by CEPs, as well as the skills, knowledge, and dispositions the work requires *(Bartha, Carney, Gale, Goodhue, & Howard, 2014; Jacoby & Mutascio, 2010; McReynolds & Shields, 2015)*. Most recently, Campus Compact's Project on the Community Engagement Professional published their preliminary competency model for community engagement professionals, an important step forward in solidifying our understanding of the profession *(Dostilio, 2017; Dostilio et al., 2016)*.

The competency model is a work in progress. As it stands, the competency model does not fully reflect the work of place-based CEPs or the hybrid roles they play in bridging community and university spaces. In this article, we—a group of active CEPs and researchers—contribute to addressing this gap through a case study of University Neighborhood Partners in Salt Lake City. In doing so, we explore some of the competencies UNP staff members utilize to engage in place-based community engagement; suggest additional competency areas that might allow the model to better encompass place-based efforts; and begin to examine how the positionalities of staff members complicate and enrich our understanding about what it takes to perform this work.

Background

University Neighborhood Partners

This article looks at the work of staff at University Neighborhood Partners (UNP), a department of the University of Utah in Salt Lake City. Through UNP, the University of Utah has adopted a place-based strategy with explicit goals to promote capacity building and community well-being on the west side of the city, while simultaneously advancing its research and teaching missions through engaged scholarship *(Fitzgerald, Burack, & Seifer, 2010; Hodges & Dubb, 2012)*. West side Salt Lake City neighborhoods are some of the most ethnically and linguistically diverse in Utah, with growing communities of immigrant and refugee background and over 80 languages spoken. According to 2010 Census data, 74.5% of Salt Lake City's Latinx residents live on the west side, and although people of Color make up a quarter of the city's population, they make up 63% of the population in west side neighborhoods *(Downen, Perlich, Wood, & Munro, 2012)*. At the same time, these neighborhoods are some of the most historically marginalized and disenfranchised, facing an array of social, cultural, political, and economic barriers to well-being. There is a long history of division and inaccessibility between the west side and the university, which many people view as an "ivory tower" sitting up in the foothills on the east side of the city.

UNP serves in what Hodges and Dubb *(2012)* called the "university as convener" role in anchor-based community development. UNP's approach is participatory and collaborative, seeking to bring neighborhood residents, community organizations/institutions, and higher education actors together in equitable, reciprocal,

long-term partnerships addressing shared goals. Over its 15-year history, UNP has supported partnerships addressing a range of resident-identified priorities, including educational access, employment, housing, citizenship, health, leadership development, and organizational capacity-building, among other areas.

Organizational structure and partnership model. UNP reports to the university president and works closely with the senior vice president for academic affairs. Initially opened with a three-person staff, UNP now has 13 full-time and two part-time staff members and a budget of around $1.5 million. UNP staff now support over 70 different partnerships that engage 77 organizational/institutional partners, five higher education institutions, 34 university units, and over 4,000 neighborhood residents a year.

UNP's partnership model positions the university as an equal partner with community residents, in a departure from models that put the university in the lead *(Hodges & Dubb, 2012)*. This approach is based on an understanding that multiple forms of knowledge and life experience are required to advance change in complex systems, including, critically, the knowledge and experiences of those most negatively impacted by the systems as they are. This model, in its idealized form, is represented in UNP's Partnership Triangle (see Figure 1, Image 1).
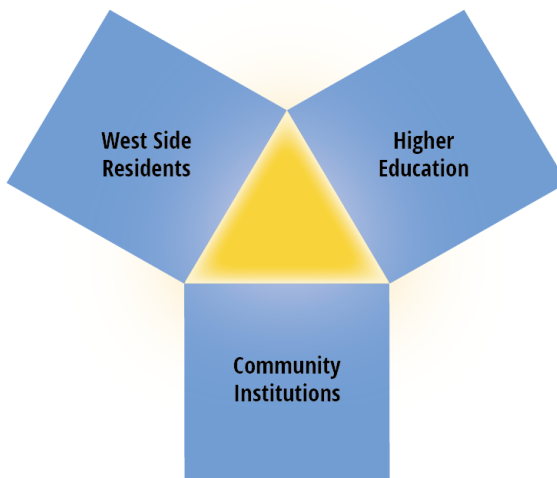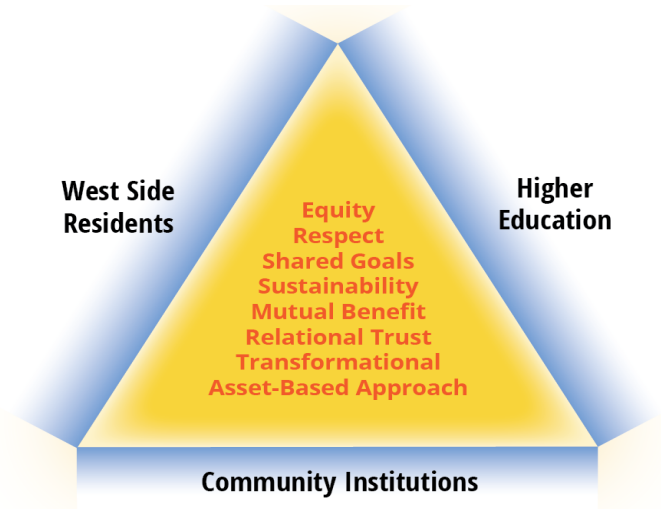

Figure 1: Image 1 UNP's Partnership Triangle

Figure 1: Image 2 UNP's Partnership Qualities
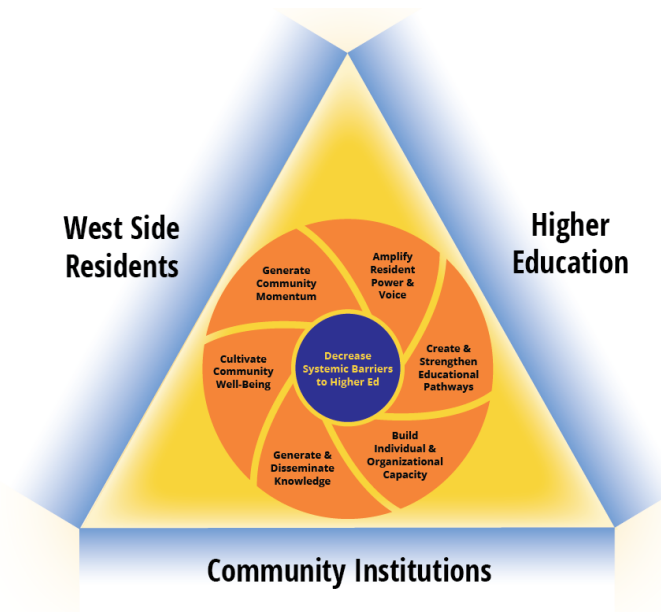

Figure 1: Image 3 UNP's Impact Areas

Partnerships are fully realized when they bring together members of UNP's three stakeholder groups: west side residents, higher education actors, and community organizations or institutions. UNP staff members are tasked with supporting the growth and development of partnerships, with a focus on increasing key qualities of an effective partnership such as equity, mutual benefit, relational trust, and an asset-based approach (see Figure 1, Image 2). Staff also support partnerships in creating, advancing, and evaluating progress toward shared goals that fall broadly into six impact areas (see Figure 1, Image 3). Of course, as we explore later in this article, the reality of partnership work is far messier and more complex than the model suggests.

Impact. Data on the impact of UNP and its partners is difficult to parse out because UNP is part of a web of individuals, organizations, and institutions working to improve quality of life in west Salt Lake City. However, there is promising evidence of long-term impact. For example, from UNP's founding through 2016, enrollment at the University of Utah from the zip codes where UNP works has increased by about 240%, and the number of graduates has increased by about 260%. The percentage changes for the local community college system from UNP's zip codes are 97% and 90% respectively. During this same period, UNP has supported leadership and organizational development for over 600 resident leaders and 10 new nonprofit organizations and has aided dozens of local residents in taking on leadership roles in local government, school decision-making bodies, and other institutions. UNP's website features a growing bibliography of scholarship that has been produced from its partnerships, including traditional journal articles and books as well as creative and practice-oriented products.

There is also evidence that the direct work of UNP staff, as explored in this article, has been effective in cultivating strong partnerships capable of meeting shared goals and objectives, though UNP has only recently begun to document this systematically. As part of UNP's annual 2017–2018 evaluation, Kara Byrne conducted a survey of 20 partners from six partnerships, adapting tools developed by Schulz et al. *(2003)* and McNall, Reed, Brown, and Allen *(2009)*. The survey measured participant opinions regarding whether key characteristics of successful partnerships were strongly present in their partnership. Each characteristic was operationalized by a scale composed of up to six positively phrased questions, and participants were asked to score each from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. The following percentages of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that their partnership had these posi-

tive characteristics: group cohesion (85%), partnership management (75%), perceived effectiveness (90%), shared power (90%), and cocreation of knowledge (55%). Of the remaining percentages, many were scored "neutral," with 10% disagreeing with cocreation of knowledge and 5% disagreeing with partnership management.

Our Research

In this article, we present a qualitative case study of partnership management work at UNP. Looking deep into a single case allows us to analyze the "how" of community engagement work as it is practiced within its particular context over time *(Yin, 2009)*. We are using the term *case study* in Stake's *(2005)* broad, methodologically flexible sense: a holistic inquiry into a bounded system. It is, in fact, a synthesis of insights from multiple sources, both research- and practice-based. In the last few years, UNP has enlisted the support of two external researchers to develop a more rigorous understanding of the work and impact of UNP and its partners. In response to the call for this special issue, we first looked to these two projects for insights. These projects were covered under UNP's blanket IRB for self-study and evaluation.

Project 1 was conducted by Kimberly Schmit, a former UNP staff member and current partner, in an independent researcher capacity. The study looked retrospectively at the work and impact of UNP and its partners over the department's 15-year history. Far more than a traditional evaluation, this study sought to uncover the underlying processes and tensions of partnership work at UNP as it has evolved over the years. The research was designed around UNP's approach to partnerships—a process of asking questions, listening, building relationships, and cocreating knowledge. It blended ethnographic and narrative methods *(Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; O'Reilly, 2012)* with a community-engaged research approach that included collaborative research design and the creation of practice-oriented products (newsletter articles, videos) to advance UNP's mission *(Strand, Cutforth, Stoecker, & Marullo, 2003)*.

Schmit conducted 38 semistructured interviews with current and former UNP partners and staff, including questions related to the skills and processes that UNP staff implement to support partnerships. She drew on her own experiences and relationships as a longtime staff member who had been immersed in the work of UNP in order to facilitate in-depth discussions—a form of insider research *(Brannick & Coghlan, 2007)*. Schmit conducted participant observation at about a dozen events; analyzed all available reports,

newsletters, strategic plans, media, and other documents; and studied longitudinal data on the local context. Schmit worked to combine the diverse narratives from these sources into a collective narrative of UNP and its partners. In addition, she drew out a set of emergent themes related to UNP's history, approach, impact, and possible futures. Concepts from leadership theory, organizational theory, and critical race theory undergirded this analysis *(Ladson-Billings, 2004; Wheatley, 2011)*.

Project 2 was a participatory design process aimed at codeveloping a theory of change to guide UNP's work *(Taplin & Rasic, 2012)*. It was conducted by Kara Byrne, a research faculty member with the Social Research Institute at the College of Social Work at the University of Utah. This design process, while not a traditional academic research project, included in-depth qualitative analysis and uncovered valuable insights about the organization. Byrne conducted semistructured qualitative interviews with the eight members of UNP's staff most directly involved in partnership work. This was followed by a series of five larger design meetings with UNP staff, the UNP Advisory Board, and a committee of resident leaders. These meetings involved a process of identifying long-term goals and then backward mapping to identify underlying assumptions, necessary actions, and potential indicators *(Taplin & Rasic, 2012)*. All interviews and meetings were recorded and transcribed for analysis. Byrne carried out a process of grounded coding *(Charmaz, 2006)* that identified 28 inductive themes, each representing an aspect of the organization's change process. In iterative dialogue with UNP staff and partners, these aspects were synthesized into a complete theory of change that included the six key impact areas mentioned above.

Although both of these projects offered findings relevant to the question of CEP competencies, neither was specifically designed to ask about this topic. In order to supplement these findings, Paul Kuttner—a partnership manager at UNP as well as a researcher—conducted semistructured qualitative interviews with the other four partnership managers. Staff were asked to read and respond to the preliminary competency model for CEPs *(Dostilio et al., 2016)* and then share their own perspectives and stories related to the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and commitments required to be a successful partnership manager. Kuttner conducted a thematic, phenomenological analysis of this data looking for preexisting themes from the competency model and the above-described studies, as well as unexpected and emergent themes *(Saldaña, 2015)*. Kuttner then took the lead in collecting themes and insights from

the three sources and synthesizing them into five overarching topic areas, which make up the sections of this article. This synthesis was used as a springboard for individual dialogues with the other authors, drawing on their insights rooted in both research and practice. We forefronted findings that could be triangulated across two or three of the sources and shared the article with UNP staff for input in order to strengthen the trustworthiness and authenticity of our findings *(Creswell & Miller, 2000)*.

This bricolage-style approach, based on diverse methods and using studies not focused directly on the question at hand, gives our analysis significant limitations. We do not claim to offer the final word on partnership management at UNP, let alone an analysis that can be generalized beyond this single case. At the same time, this approach has allowed us to bring multiple perspectives and forms of knowledge to bear on a question of great importance to the field. It has ignited important new conversations among UNP staff members. We offer this exploratory analysis as an initial step in illuminating an understudied area, and as a way to point toward valuable questions, themes, and topics that will benefit from future research.

The Roles and Competencies of Partnership Managers

This article was written in conversation with the preliminary competency model for community engagement professionals published by Campus Compact *(Dostilio et al., 2106)*. The competency model attempts to lay out the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and critical commitments that community engagement professionals (CEPs) utilize in their work. Through an iterative process involving a literature review, online surveys, and focus groups, Dostilio and her colleagues identified six overarching "functional areas" of work, each with its own set of competencies: leading change in higher education, institutionalizing community engagement on campus, facilitating students' civic learning and development, administering community engagement programs, facilitating faculty development and support, and cultivating high quality partnerships.

In the following sections, we explore the ways that UNP's approach resonates with and differs from the functional areas in the competency model and offer an analysis of the unique competencies necessary to do this kind of place-based partnership work at UNP. As the authors of the framework have noted *(L. D. Dostilio, personal communication, February 22, 2018)*, place-based initiatives

were underrepresented in the initial research. This article does not contradict the competency model, but rather suggests additions to the model, shifting the emphases to encompass place-based engagement. In particular, because UNP's model decenters the university and engages community residents as partners, its work places a greater emphasis on community-facing competencies and the complexities of cultivating partnerships amid unequal power relationships. UNP staff must combine the skills and aptitudes of higher education professionals with those of grassroots community organizers, supporting residents in building power and leadership capacity and having a voice in how their community changes.

The Multiple Roles of Partnership Managers

UNP staff members whose work is most directly focused on building community–university partnerships (usually) carry the title of partnership manager. Partnership managers are tasked with connecting partners around resident-identified priorities; supporting partnerships in developing shared goals, mutual trust, equity, and reciprocity; promoting equitable flow of resources among partners; and guiding and cultivating partnerships over time. Activities vary greatly across partnership type and stage of development, and can include meeting planning and facilitation, relationship building, seed funding, strategic planning, evaluation, and other forms of support.

Partnership managers must have the capacity for significant flexibility, adaptability, and creativity and cannot stick to a narrow conceptualization of their role. As one staff member put it, partnership managers must be ready to identify and "fill in the gaps" where each partnership needs support. This entails navigating across multiple systems, institutions, and cultures, each with its own languages, norms, and internal logic. Partnership managers often find themselves jumping between an array of roles that include the following and more:

- translator across communities and institutions;
- advocate for voices missing in the discussion;
- facilitator of critical action-reflection processes;
- student, listening to and learning from partners;
- teacher, supporting learning and development;
- connector of people, organizations, information, ideas, and resources;

- mediator, attending to emotions, conflict, and power relationships;
- catalyst for building momentum toward change; and
- mentor and friend.

In the following section we outline four key areas of practice that are critical to partnership management and the many roles it entails. These areas of practice, and the competencies they require, are—from the perspective of UNP—underemphasized or absent in the current iteration of the competency model.

The Competencies of Partnership Management

The competency model reflects a heavy focus on university-facing work: how to support student learning and faculty development, how to coordinate and institutionalize community engagement at the college or university, and how to lead change in higher education *(Dostilio, 2017)*. UNP staff is involved in all of these functional areas. Student learning is an important goal of UNP and is carried out through partnerships that include community-engaged learning courses, research projects, and student internships. For example, UNP supports a community walk-in center staffed by social work students doing their practicum placements. Faculty development and support is also key; partnership managers recruit and work closely with faculty to integrate community engagement into their teaching and research.

UNP is invested in long-term institutionalization and change at the University of Utah and within the field of higher education, often working in partnership with other community engagement offices and centers at the university. Recent efforts include participation in a task force to recommend changes to promotion and tenure policies in order to effectively evaluate community-engaged scholarship and taking part in the statewide Community Campus Compact effort to develop civic action plans for all colleges and universities. However, because these areas of work are addressed in the framework, we will not expand on them. Instead, we will examine four areas that focus more heavily on community-facing competencies as well as on the intricacies of managing partnerships for equity and systems change: (1) relationship building, (2) building community leadership and organizational capacity, (3) community and systems change, and (4) engaging power. As we explore in our conclusion, these areas expand on what the compe-

tency model calls "cultivating high quality partnerships" and suggest additional functional areas.

Relationship building. The work of convening partnerships is, first and foremost, about relationships. The ability to cultivate and maintain trusting, reciprocal relationships with and among partners is absolutely necessary for partnership managers *(Martin & Crossland, 2017)*. Past literature on campus–community partnerships emphasized the facilitation of relationships among higher education and community organization partners, within the context of a partnership, through inclusive and democratic processes, effective communication, interdependency, commitment to mutual benefit and shared goals, and honoring what each brings to the table (e.g., *Gass, 2010; Leiderman, Furco, Zapf, & Goss, 2002; Martin & Crossland, 2017*). Less attention has gone to the relational groundwork necessary to build effective partnerships, something that is especially important for convening new partnerships; creating space for authentic leadership from community residents; and rooting partnership work in communities' priorities, assets, history, and local context. The field of community organizing, among others, has built a significant body of knowledge in this area (e.g., *Chambers, 2003; Christens, 2010; Minkler, 2012*).

At UNP, partnership managers are in a constant process of developing and maintaining relationships with individuals across stakeholder groups. This work is very time-intensive and takes place in a wide range of contexts. As one community leader put it, "You can't do community work from behind a desk." Although formal spaces are important, it is often more informal and "intimate" spaces that facilitate deeper forms of information exchange, idea sharing, and relationship building. Staff and partners speak to how small forms of day-to-day work and unplanned moments make up the foundation of trusting relationships: chatting in the parking lot after an event, helping a community member move, eating together, and so on. In addition, there are more structured practices that managers can learn in order to build and deepen relationships, such as one-on-one meetings, learning to tell one's story of self, and active or empathic listening *(Chambers, 2003; Ganz, 2010; McNaughton, Hamlin, McCarthy, Head-Reeves, & Schreiner, 2008)*. But whatever the approach, managers stress the importance of being "present" in both the physical and psychological sense. They describe this work as both intrinsically rewarding and, at times, exhausting, calling on individuals to dig deep into their own internal resources.

Crossing boundaries. Partnership managers must be consummate boundary crossers. A partnership manager might meet with a faculty member on campus in the morning to discuss their research interests, present to staff at a local agency in the afternoon about how to improve their community engagement strategies, and share a meal with community leaders at an evening event. In each situation the culture, expectations, norms, and languages might differ, calling on partnership managers to understand and adapt to these differences while at the same time staying true to the manager's authentic self.

One staff member explained some of the underlying dispositions and commitments you need to build relationships across these contexts:

> You have to love people. You cannot just say, "I have to work this job." You have to have the drive to want to do this job not just nine-to-five but when people need you. . . . What I notice is that people can automatically tell whether you're sincere or not. If you are sincere—about the job, about the work, about the community—they will gravitate towards you and you can get a lot of work done. . . . You have to be aware of yourself, the situation, and the people that you are working with, and you have to have cultural humility, that you are working for people and you care about their lives deeply.

The concept of cultural humility is an important one, given that partnership managers are constantly crossing and blurring cultural borders. In contrast to the idea of cultural competency, which assumes there is a body of knowledge about a culture that an individual can master, cultural humility is a lifelong commitment to learn with others *(Tervalon & Murray-García, 1998)*. Partnership managers practice cultural humility when they are self-reflective about their assumptions and biases, when they are open to learning new ways of seeing and being in the world, when they admit they do not know what they do not know, and when they commit to challenging systems that privilege one culture over another. This requires critical listening skills and a deep curiosity about people and the environment. It takes a willingness to move in spaces beyond your cultural comfort zone. One staff member, for example, described how she entered into this work by immersing herself in a new neighborhood:

> As a new partnership manager, what I've been trying to do is get a lay of the land and make time to engage, because I think it would be easy to get bogged down with a lot of the maintenance of partnerships. . . . Sometimes it takes that extra effort of getting outside of your comfort zone. For example, I've been trying to take training or volunteer opportunities as a way just to get to know the community. Last Saturday I canvassed the area surrounding the park here as a volunteer for the 2020 Census. I felt like it would be a good reason to just walk the neighborhood. So simple, right? Taking the time to walk the neighborhood and see areas that have a lot of activity, folks are coming in and out, folks are just hanging out on their patios, and you wave, "Hi."

Responsivity. Partnership managers must have the inclination and ability to be flexible and responsive to partners: communicating in their preferred mode, focusing on their priorities, adapting to their schedules, and adjusting to different paces of work. They need to create multiple entry points for engagement and maintain an open invitation to collaborate throughout the ebbs and flows of people's lives. Staff members often refer to this as "meeting people where they are at." This requires managers to put aside their own agendas and focus on the priorities of partners. It also requires a strong belief in people—their assets, their intelligence, their leadership ability, their potential for growth—no matter the deficit narratives about their community, or the history of the institutions they represent.

In addition, partnership managers need to have a level of compassion and understanding of others' situations, and of the differing things that are at stake for different partners. As one staff member put it, "It's about being humane. You have to be very considerate, because you're not just dealing with 'issues' . . . you're dealing with issues that affect people's lives, things that can impact whole families and change their lives completely." For this staff member, who grew up in the neighborhoods and has faced many of the challenges and injustices common among residents, building relationships is also about "identifying yourself with other people in the community that are struggling." Seeing yourself in the community, and the community in yourself, may come more naturally for staff who are from the neighborhood. However, it is a goal that all UNP staff can strive for—a shift from "them" to "us."

Collective relationships. Managers need to be able to move beyond individual relationships toward building collective relationships, both within and across partnerships. In other words, partnership managers are building *community*. This means challenging dynamics of isolation, siloing, and fragmentation and instead fostering connection, interdependence, and belonging *(Block, 2008)*. To do this, partnership managers need to have an orientation toward collaboration and collective action (as opposed to hyperindividualism). They also need an understanding of how webs of trusting, interdependent relationships increase social capital and the collective capacity communities need to create lasting change *(Saegert, Thompson, & Warren, 2002)*.

Sometimes building community takes place within groups that have similar backgrounds, social positions, and life experiences—for example, building community among Latinx parents—while at other times it is about bridging between individuals in vastly different social and professional spaces. Either way, partnership managers must listen closely to the interests, perspectives, and goals of partners in order to see opportunities for connection and be able to facilitate processes and create spaces in which relationships can flourish. Controlled meeting environments do not always support this approach. Celebrations, for example, are a key community-building practice at UNP, so sometimes staff need to know how to throw a party.

Building community leadership and organizational capacity. The competency model includes two functional areas focused on learning and development among partners: facilitating students' civic learning and development and facilitating faculty development and support. For place-based efforts like UNP, equal attention must be paid to learning and development among community partners *(Hodges & Dubb, 2012)*. Increased opportunities for community residents and organizations to build their capacities, take on leadership roles, and achieve their priorities is an end goal of UNP, as well as an integral part of the process of building equitable partnerships.

When UNP was founded, there were already established community leaders and community organizations on the west side. Many of these were included in the initial research and came to partner with UNP and serve on its advisory board. At the same time, UNP saw that there were many unrecognized and potential leaders in the community who were looking for opportunities to increase their leadership skills, take on larger roles, and establish new organizations. For this reason, UNP made "resident lead-

ership" one of its three initial partnership areas. Over the years, UNP established a number of partnerships focused explicitly on community leadership, such as the Westside Leadership Institute (a course on community organizing), the Community Advocate Network (a group of organized parents), and the Startup Incubator (a partnership supporting residents in establishing for-profit and nonprofit organizations). However, supporting leadership development and organizational capacity-building is not just the work of certain partnerships. It is something that partnership managers must attend to across partnerships. It is key to supporting equitable participation and shared power, and to ensuring that all partners benefit from collaboration by having opportunities to learn and grow personally and professionally.

Supporting individual leaders. In order to support resident leadership development, partnership managers must have an understanding of leadership as distributed, or shared, across an organization or community *(Pearce & Conger, 2002; Spillane, 2012).* This perspective challenges traditional notions of leadership as top-down and reserved for those with positional power. Instead, it recognizes that well-functioning organizations and communities are "leader-ful," with many different leaders playing different roles *(Raelin, 2003).* Partnership managers must also understand leadership as a developmental process rather than a fixed attribute: people are not born "natural" leaders but rather develop and become leaders through the practice of leading. From this perspective, a key responsibility of leaders is to support others taking up leadership roles, or, as Ganz *(2010)* puts it, "Leadership is accepting responsibility to create conditions that enable others to achieve shared purpose in the face of uncertainty" *(p. 509).*

Partnership managers need to develop some understanding of how people move toward leadership: the knowledge, skills, and attitudes they develop and the roles that managers can play in supporting that process. For example, Warren, Mapp, and Kuttner *(2015)* laid out six roles that community organizers play in supporting residents who are moving toward increased leadership. It begins with listening to people's stories and passions and building relationships with and among residents. As individuals show interest in taking on more leadership, organizers act as mentors, encourage residents to take risks and step up into new roles, and create opportunities for residents to learn through doing. Finally, organizers support residents in linking personal struggles and priorities to larger goals. This kind of mentoring and support is not a

linear process but rather a delicate and relational art, as one UNP staff member explains:

> You have to be very mindful of people and have clear understanding of the wants and needs of the community. You have to provide a lot of guidance so people will see you as a leader. But you also have to be open to sharing that leadership, passing it onto others. Also, be cautious about people being ready for that next step because if you push too hard you can lose people. Be aware and pay a lot of attention and have a lot of patience, knowing when it is the right time to, I don't want to say push, but to support people in their next steps.

Supporting organizations. A somewhat different set of competencies is required when supporting organizational development, whether new grassroots organizations or larger, more established partners. Organizational partners have vastly differing learning needs. A small start-up might need to learn how to establish a board or make a strategic plan, whereas a larger established organization may need to learn how to better engage community. Partnership managers do not need to be experts in organizational development—they can pull in partners with specific areas of expertise—but they do need some basic understanding of how organizations function, how they are structured and funded, and the strengths and weaknesses of organizations as agents of change.

Whether working with individuals or organizations, managers need to be aware of the danger of leader fatigue. Passionate and engaged leaders often risk burnout, and this issue can be exacerbated when partnership managers find themselves relying on a small group of leaders for multiple efforts. With its most recent strategic plan, UNP is looking to improve how it attends to the health and well-being of existing leaders and how engaging a larger array of individuals and organizations can ease demands on long-term partners.

Community and systems change. The community challenges that UNP and its partners are addressing—educational inequity, poverty, political marginalization, poor health outcomes, and more—are what are sometimes called "wicked problems" *(Rittel & Webber, 1974)*. They defy clear and simple solutions because they are inherently complex, they are embedded in systems of interdependent parts in which the results of actions are hard to predict, and they implicate a wide range of stakeholders who do not agree on the

definition of the problem, let alone the solution *(Kania & Kramer, 2013)*. Sustainable change in communities cannot be achieved purely by working with individuals to make better choices, access more resources, or institute new practices. It requires a systems approach.

Partnership managers must develop a critical understanding of how systems work to produce the outcomes we see. This means moving from a focus on the individual toward an understanding of individuals as embedded in families, communities, institutions, and larger economic, cultural, and social systems. It means learning how activities in each realm affect the others, often in unintended ways. It means developing a critique of the way systems privilege some people, groups, ideas, and cultures over others.

Fortunately, many concepts and tools are available to help managers better understand these interconnected webs: systems thinking (e.g., *Stroh, 2015*), emergence (e.g., *Wheatley & Frieze, 2006*), ecological systems theories (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 2005), complexity theory (e.g., *Byrne, 2002*), living systems *(Capra, 1997)*, and many more. Building an understanding of systems allows managers and partners to better navigate the systems as they are and figure out how they can be changed to work differently. It focuses attention on the root causes of social ills and helps avoid deficit frameworks that place the blame squarely on low-wealth communities and communities of Color for their struggles *(Valencia, 2012)*.

In addition to understanding systems, partnership managers must be able to move across system "levels" and work at different scales. For example, depending on the partnership and its strategy, managers might be working with individual families, large institutions, or the broader culture and policy environment. In each case a systems analysis is necessary, but the starting point is different, so partnership managers need to be able to "zoom out" and "zoom in" as needed. Importantly, managers need to be able to see and make connections across levels, building up feedback loops and relationships *(Capra, 1997)*. For example, UNP's walk-in center is often called upon to support families to secure and maintain housing. The partnership Community Voices for Housing Equality (CVHE) uses action research to propose policy changes related to tenant–landlord relations and evictions. These two efforts are equally important and ideally inform one another, with the individual experiences of residents in the walk-in center informing CVHE policy proposals and CVHE offering participation opportunities for residents who want to make broader change in the community. Partnership managers can support these connections by linking

individuals, information, resources, and ideas across partnerships, something UNP is increasingly focused on.

Many efforts at systems change have been critiqued for bringing together powerful institutional leaders but leaving out the voices of community members most impacted (e.g., *Cabaj & Weaver, 2016; McAfee, Blackwell, & Bell, 2015*). One UNP partnership manager similarly cautions against approaches to systems change that don't keep the people most impacted at the center. For him, the key is humanization:

> How do I humanize and give value and voice to not only myself but to the people that I know who have historically been left out? Partnerships, partners—these are all made up of people. Everything functions at that level in one way or another. We can think of how groups of people form structures or organizations, but at the end of the day it still matters. It's not a machine. It still requires interaction and the relationship piece. At the more fundamental level, it's the maintenance of relationships and the desire to be in community.

Creating systemic change in our communities is a complex process impacted by factors far outside any one group's control. Partnership managers must live in the tension between planning for the future on one hand and letting go of control on the other. At UNP, partnership managers work with partners to develop explicit goals, set observable outcomes, collect relevant data, and assess progress toward goals. At the same time, they recognize that, within complex systems, outcomes are difficult to predict and effective solutions often cannot be predetermined *(Kania & Kramer, 2013)*. Many times the best way forward begins as an outlier idea that challenges the normal way of doing things, an idea that is new and risky but that energizes the partners. It is for this reason that managers put so much of their focus on the quality of partnership processes, trusting that effective solutions will emerge from effective processes (see Figure 1).

In addition, partnership managers must avoid the instinct to control, or own, a particular change effort. UNP is not in competition with others who share similar goals. In fact, many of the most significant impacts that UNP has had were not the direct result of UNP's work but rather resulted from a "ripple effect" of UNP's activities. UNP might help launch a partnership but may not be involved in how the partnership evolves or how others learn from

the partnership to shape their own work. For example, UNP runs a "partnership center" in its neighborhoods that, over the years, has inspired and informed similar projects both in and outside Salt Lake City.

Finally, systems change is slow. Even as small successes are celebrated along the way, partnerships often hit setbacks, and the full impact of partnership work can take years to materialize. Managers need to have a strong understanding of *why* they are doing this work if they are going to maintain their motivation. Although the language used by each partnership manager may vary, they need at the very least to have a commitment to equity, to centering minoritized voices, and to a vision of a more socially just future. And they must attend to the ongoing risk of burnout and exhaustion, finding ways to care for themselves and to preserve their health and well-being and that of their families.

Engaging power. The inequities that UNP seeks to address are rooted in unequal power relationships; therefore, any attempt to make systemic improvements must take power into account. Partnership managers must develop an understanding of how power functions across multiple domains to produce injustice, as well as how it can be built and used by groups that have been historically marginalized and oppressed. Although power is sometimes very visible—for example, when an advocacy group uses political power to advance a new policy—power also functions in many less visible ways: through how systems are structured, through the policies and procedures of institutions, and through the narratives and norms of our shared culture *(Collins, 2009)*. Partnership managers must be able to work with partners both to identify power relationships in the realm where they are working and to determine how their efforts can help shift relationships toward greater equality.

Of particular relevance are power relationships between institutions of higher education and surrounding communities—what is often called the "town and gown" divide *(Martin, Smith, & Philips, 2005)*. This power relationship is particularly unequal when primarily White institutions (PWI) like the University of Utah are engaging with low-wealth communities and communities of Color like those in Salt Lake City's west side. UNP was founded, in part, to address this imbalance. During the research that led to UNP's founding, west side residents said they were tired of university faculty and staff coming into the neighborhoods to study them, or provide services for them, and then leaving when their project ended or their grant ran out. They wanted a say—power—in the research projects and other programs taking place in their neigh-

borhoods. UNP's goal is to shift from an extractive relationship to a reciprocal relationship, one in which residents are at the decision-making table and seeing the benefits of partnership to the community. Managers need to understand the ways that they are implicated in this dynamic and be committed to shifting it. They are asked to navigate the university's systems and leverage its resources while challenging those same systems to make changes.

More broadly, managers must develop an understanding of the "lay of the land" in terms of power, resources, and decision making. Who are the major players in the neighborhoods, the city, the state, and so on? What assets are available for partnership work, and what are the main barriers? When consequential decisions are made, who makes them and at what system level? Keeping up with this evolving landscape requires research skills. Sometimes this includes formal research, as when UNP has taken part in asset mapping. At other times it is about more informal, ongoing inquiry into UNP's context.

Shifting power. For partnership managers, the work of shifting power relationships often starts at the micro level, within the partnerships themselves. Partners come to the table from very different places and are the beneficiaries of different levels of privilege based on their position in an institution, their race and ethnicity, their gender and sexual orientation, their age, their formal education, and other factors. Partners also bring their cultural assumptions and biases into the space with them. Managers must be able to see and name these dynamics when they threaten to harm the partnership and take steps to equalize power among partners without having key stakeholders leave the table. Because of historic power imbalances, it is particularly key to be able to center resident leaders and resident voices. This is a delicate but vital dance, as one staff member explains:

> One of the skills a partnership manager needs to have is to be able to see power differences around a table. They need to be able to hear what's not being said. They need to be able to see in people's body language what's happening, literally around the table. Because one thing we're doing is balancing out power relationships. People who are blind to power cannot do this work. If you can't manage a relationship in which racism is coming up at the table you cannot do this work.

There are many different methods managers use to disrupt power imbalances in partnerships. For example, numbers matter: If a particular partner is at risk of being marginalized, managers might invite a group rather than just an individual. Who is at the table matters as well, and bringing a more diverse array of partners can help to hinder any one group from dominating. But a lot of the work of balancing power comes through the partnership manager's role as a facilitator. The art of facilitating groups of partners is something UNP staff have had explicit training in—how to guide discussions and planning in ways that are inclusive of all voices, take into account and value the different life experiences of partners, address conflict in healthy ways, focus partners on shared goals and reciprocity, and promote collaborative learning. Finally, it is difficult to address power relationships in the partnerships without addressing them among the staff first, where many of these same unequal power dynamics arise.

Partnership Management and Positionality

One aspect of partnership management that is obscured by a generalized competency framework is the question of *who* is doing the work. Partnership managers' positionalities—their identities, values, personal histories, and so on—impact how they engage in partnerships, who they engage with, and what partnership work means to them. For example, one staff member described how his approach to partnership management is rooted deeply in his own cultural background as someone who came to the United States years ago as a refugee from Somalia:

> I would say it all depends on the culture you grew up in. If you come from a culture that is individualistic you look at individuals and what are the benefits. But, if you come from a communal, collectivist culture, then what is the benefit for the community? It just depends on the culture you grew up in and how you were raised. How I approach partnership management is exactly how I was raised: What is the benefit for everyone that lives on the west side?

Another staff member, meanwhile, explains that multiple aspects of his identity shape how he works with community:

> The way that I do the work is because of who I am and the kinds of interests that I've had. I grew up in this

public school system, I'm from this city, I am Chicano, I come from a migrant family. These identities play a role first in almost everything.

Of particular importance for UNP is the question of whether staff members are residents of UNP's neighborhoods and whether they identify culturally, racially, or ethnically with the communities living there. UNP has long made a practice of bringing local residents into the organization, and today over half of the staff identifies as former or current residents of the neighborhoods and/or representative of the communities living there (though these staff members tend to be in less senior positions, reflecting, as mentioned above, larger power imbalances). Staff members with community roots bring critical knowledge, deep relationships, and firsthand experience, all of which are invaluable to the work and very difficult for outsiders to develop. The work is extremely personal for them because they are working for their families, their neighborhoods, their history, and their future in a way that is not as true for those with fewer roots in the area. These staff are often asked to take on additional roles: to hold the trust of family and community members, to connect personal relationships to new people and spaces, to be spokespeople for their communities at the university and other institutions, and to sit in spaces where they are often misunderstood or their knowledge invalidated. Resident staff members report great benefits and a sense of power from this work, but it can also place residents in positions of tension between work and community, and it requires a high level of patience, resiliency, and long-term vision.

If partnership work varies based on who the manager is, then the question may not be just "What competencies do all partnership managers need?" but also "Who needs to be on staff in order for the organization to have the full range of necessary competencies?" UNP has benefited greatly from hiring staff who represent the diversity of its multiple communities in terms of race, ethnicity, country of origin, gender, sexual orientation, educational background, connection to local neighborhoods, and more (although, again, these staff members tend to be in less senior positions). Within UNP, staff members bring diverse perspectives to the table and often play the role of advocate for their partners and communities. The resulting discussions may be difficult at times, but they deepen everyone's understanding of the work. Partnership managers can also take on different roles based on their unique capabilities and positionalities. It is not as simple as managers con-

necting best with those most similar to them, though shared experiences definitely play a role. Rather, managers tap into different facets of themselves at different times, using these to build bridges among partners and spaces. One staff member, for example, is a local resident of refugee background, a leader in his mosque, and is now finishing his second master's degree at the university, giving him a foot in multiple worlds and a powerful position from which to build bridges.

If there is an overarching competency here, it is perhaps introspection. Partnership managers need to have a good understanding of their own positionality within communities, organizations, and systems, and be aware of how others see them. This allows them to be strategic in using their various forms of privilege and capital to engage and influence partners. Managers must be able to bring their full selves into the work and make room for their colleagues to do the same, recognizing the complex identities and assets each brings to the table. When UNP is at its best, staff members work to understand one another not only in the context of UNP, but in the context of their families, communities, cultures, histories, and hopes for the future. They support one another in addressing life priorities, whether that means advancing their educations or making time to be with family. They take into account the physical, mental, and emotional health of themselves and others, and they support one another in developing the practices, boundaries, and attitudes needed for self-care.

Discussion

In this article, we put the preliminary competency model for community engagement professionals published by Campus Compact *(Dostilio et al., 2016)* in conversation with the community partnership approach of University Neighborhood Partners at the University of Utah. The result can help us deepen our understanding of what it takes to "cultivate high-quality partnerships" in a place-based partnership effort rooted in a university-as-convener model *(Hodges & Dubb, 2012; Martin & Crossland, 2017)*. In particular, it stresses the ability to build webs of trusting relationships across communities and to engage effectively with questions of power and positionality. Although underemphasized in research on CEPs, these competency areas are well developed in other fields, such as community organizing.

This research also suggests two possible additions to the six functional areas in the initial framework that could benefit from

further research. The first is related to advancing community and systems change. During pilot testing of the competency model, it was suggested that "community and economic development" be added as a functional area, but it was too late in the process to add it (*Dostilio, 2017*). This research suggests something similar: a functional area related to the type of long-term impacts that community–university partnerships seek. The second possible addition is a functional area having to do with supporting the development of leadership and organizational capacity among community partners. This may not be a focus of all centers, but those invested in resident-led, grassroots community change may find this a key underpinning of successful work and an important corollary to the areas of faculty development and student learning.

This study also complicates the competency model by raising questions about how staff positionality affects the way CEPs understand and carry out their work. For example, it is true that all CEPs need to have competency in the area of relationship building. However, that broad statement can obscure the fact that how CEPs build relationships, what kind of shape those relationships take, what those relationships mean, and the stakes involved all vary greatly. This dynamic deserves further exploration. For example, does the competency model contain assumptions about the positionality of CEPs, based on who answered the survey or who tends to hold these positions? How can it be more encompassing of multiple positionalities? These questions do not challenge the usefulness of the model. Rather, they remind us to live in the tension between the generalized and the particular, between dominant trends on the one hand and the beautiful messiness of reality on the other.

Conclusion

It is certainly not the case that all managers at UNP practice all of these competencies all the time. Rather, these competency areas represent ongoing areas of individual and collective learning. UNP itself has some way to go in terms of developing a shared understanding about what it takes to be a partnership manager and how best to help staff develop those capabilities. In the past, UNP relied on informal mentorship, supporting staff members' own educational priorities and hiring people who already possess many of the required skills. The process of writing this article has helped to catalyze a discussion within UNP about the skills, knowledge, and dispositions that help staff do their work, and how the organization might be more intentional about creating opportunities to develop

them. In return, we hope that, by sharing the work of UNP, we can help to enrich and further this important fieldwide conversation.

Acknowledgments

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About the Authors

Paul J. Kuttner is associate director of University Neighborhood Partners at the University of Utah, where he builds university–community partnerships that promote educational equity and justice. His research focuses on collaboration between communities and educational institutions across the PreK-to-postsecondary spectrum. He received his Ed.D. in community, culture, and education from the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Kara Byrne is a research assistant professor at the University of Utah College of Social Work. Her research focus includes participatory action research, evidence-based practice in child welfare and juvenile justice settings, and community–university partnerships. She received her Ph.D. in social work from the University of Utah.

Kimberly Schmit is an educator, community organizer, and educational consultant affiliated with the University of Utah. Her research interests focus on understanding the processes and impacts of recentering marginalized voices within the systems and institutions that affect them, as well as exploring the methods needed for sustaining collectives that transcend traditional boundaries and create opportunities in education for marginalized communities. She received her M.Ed. in education, culture, and society from the University of Utah.

Sarah Munro is special assistant to the president for campus–community partnerships and director of University Neighborhood Partners at the University of Utah. Her research interest is committed to fostering community leadership in multicultural settings and is particularly focused on how academic

research can be enriched through collaborations between faculty/students and community stakeholders. She received her Ph.D. in anthropology from the University of Michigan.

Driven by What? Long-term Career Objectives of Community Engagement Professionals

Kira Pasquesi, Lane Graves Perry III, and B. Tait Kellogg

Abstract

This article presents a qualitative study designed to examine the long-term career objectives of individuals building careers as community engagement professionals (CEPs). CEPs administratively support engagement between a college or university and broader communities. We employed a team data analysis approach called consensual qualitative research to describe the long-term career objectives of CEPs and infer drivers, or key influences, of future career pathways. Data were drawn from 314 responses to the open-ended survey question "What are your long-term career objectives?" Findings offer insight into the professional lives and roles of CEPs by articulating the body of long-term career objectives that inform a diversity of career trajectories in the field. We review the study purpose, relevant literature, research methods, findings, and implications for future research. *Keywords:* career preparation, professional development, community engagement professional, professional identity, consensual qualitative research

Introduction

" My current position is my dream," mused one community engagement professional (CEP) when asked about their long-term career objective. Additional CEPs articulated career goals, including a hybrid list of university-based responsibilities ("a combination of research, teaching and university administration") and contributing to large-scale goals ("meaningful contribution to social change"). Still other CEPs indicated they were unsure about what pathways are realistically open to them in an evolving field of community engagement in higher education. These perspectives are among the 314 responses to an open-ended survey question: "What is your long-term career objective?" This question was part of a larger study of CEP professional competencies *(Dostilio, 2017)*. By interrogating survey data in response to the question, this study seeks to describe long-term career objectives of CEPs and infer drivers, or key influences, shaping career pathways.

CEPs are individuals who administratively support engagement between a college or university and broader communities

(Dostilio, 2016; Dostilio & McReynolds, 2015). Among other aspects of a distinct profession, CEPs share an understanding of their professional identity *(Dostilio & Perry, 2017)*. *Professional identity* refers to how one defines oneself in a professional role over time and is based on attributes, motivations, beliefs, values, and experiences *(Ibarra, 1999; Schein, 1978)*. For CEPs, this shared identity has emerged in contexts that are often betwixt and between traditional boundaries of higher education. A myriad of CEP career pathways continue to unfold as colleges and universities institutionalize community engagement informed by dissimilar motivations and administrative models. Welch and Saltmarsh *(2013)* refer to the shift in the community engagement field away from transactional or practical functions to more transformational or change-oriented civic work as the second generation of community engagement in higher education. However, scholarship on the second generation of community engagement has focused more on organizational structures, with scant research on the role of individuals facilitating university–community programs and relationships.

The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of individuals building careers as CEPs by describing long-term career objectives in the field. Study findings offer new insight into CEPs by describing drivers of long-term career objectives. By identifying and unpacking drivers behind a diversity of CEP career pathways, the study can enhance applications of the preliminary competency model for community engagement professionals (referred to hereinafter as the preliminary competency model; *Dostilio et al., 2017*) to career planning and professional development.

Review of Literature

In recent years, scholars have identified the need for empirical research on CEPs as a professional group, calling for a deeper understanding of CEP competencies and shared dispositions *(Dostilio, 2016)*. Books, articles, and professional development resources have heeded this call with CEPs as the intended audience *(Bartha, Carney, Gale, Goodhue, & Howard, 2014; Jacoby & Mutascio, 2010; McReynolds & Shields, 2015)*. Building on these works, Dostilio et al. *(2017)* sought to expand the collective understanding of CEPs by developing a competency model that offers an empirical basis for individuals navigating community engagement work. Through this preliminary model, researchers now have a sense of what types of skills, knowledge, abilities, and dispositions are necessary for multiple facets of community engagement work. However, more research is needed to understand the professional roles and lives of the people

who make up the field, including their long-term career objectives. This study draws upon three distinct bodies of literature to inform the examination of CEP long-term career objectives: related frameworks or orientations in career development literature (e.g., *Briscoe & Hall, 2006; Gouldner, 1957*); scholarship on advanced careers in the adjacent profession of higher education and student affairs (e.g., *Biddix, 2013*); and studies of faculty careers in community engagement (e.g., *O'Meara, Sandmann, Saltmarsh, & Giles, 2011*).

Career Development Theories

The field of career development offers a multitude of well-researched concepts of professional pathways that offer relevant conceptual tools for understanding CEPs and potentially other postsecondary professions. As traditional structures of career development have changed in today's more dynamic economy, career development scholars have put forward a set of concepts that describe less rigid and more organizationally independent career pathways.

The notions of "boundaryless" and "protean" careers offer a model for how professionals might be oriented towards success in life and work beyond a career arrangement within a single organization *(Briscoe & Hall, 2006)*. Boundaryless careers transcend traditional boundaries of an organization, drawing on both social networks and validation outside the employer organization *(Arthur & Rousseau, 1996)*. A protean career is defined as one in which the individual is both values-driven and self-directed in managing their own career trajectory *(Hall, 1996, 2002, 2004)*. Using metaphors, Briscoe and Hall *(2006)* offer eight career profiles to capture the relationship within and across boundaryless and/or protean orientations (i.e., trapped/lost, fortressed, the wanderer, the idealist, solid citizen, hired gun/hired hand, organization man/woman, protean career architect). For example, the "idealist" is highly protean (or values-driven) but has low levels of boundaryless (or physical mobility), an orientation that requires they find organizations that fit their values without requiring mobility. Building on this work, Dany, Louvel, and Valette *(2011)* emphasized complex interactions between structures and individual agency in academic career pathways influenced by promotion scripts (e.g., credibility). Promotion scripts stem from individuals' interpretations, and thus reconstructions, of promotion models in academe.

A second model of career development theorized two career identities according to organizational loyalty, commitment to spe-

cialized skills, and use of inner or outer group references *(Delbecq & Elfner, 1970; Gouldner, 1957)*. According to Gouldner *(1957)*, cosmopolitans have lower institutional loyalty, higher commitment to specialized skills, and a more external reference group (referring to the profession), whereas locals have higher institutional loyalty, lower commitment to specialized professional skills, and a stronger internal reference group (referring to the institution). Related research applied cosmopolitan/local orientations to faculty careers *(Grimes, 1980)*, and more recent scholarship critiqued detached relationships between professionals and local communities and the invisibilities of identities (class, race, gender) in the theory *(Rhoades, Kiyama, McCormick, & Quiroz, 2008)*.

Arthur *(2008)* invited applications of career development theories to the lived experiences of individuals in a variety of relevant fields, particularly interdisciplinary ones. The current study explores the long-term career objectives of CEPs, shaped in part by how elements of the boundaryless/protean and cosmopolitan/local concepts might unfold for careers in college and university community engagement.

Advanced Careers in Student Affairs

Although research on CEP career pathways is still emerging, the adjacent (and sometimes overlapping) field of student affairs professionals in higher education has a more developed set of literature interrogating its own career paths. Specific to midlevel professionals, scholars have examined intent to leave *(Johnsrud, Heck, & Rosser, 2000; Rosser & Javinar, 2003)*; skills and professional development needs *(Fey & Carpenter, 1996)*; and professional identity, career commitment, and career entrenchment *(Wilson, Liddell, Hirschy, & Pasquesi, 2016)*. Although research on new professionals in student affairs abounds (e.g., *Renn & Hodges, 2007; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008; Tull, 2006; Tull, Hirt, & Saunders, 2009)*, researchers have begun to address a gap in the literature by turning their gaze to midlevel administrators (e.g., *Rosser, 2004; Young, 2007)*.

A study of senior student affairs officers (SSAOs) parallels the purpose of the current study of CEPs' long-term career objectives. Biddix *(2013)* quantitatively examined career pathways and identified three possible trajectories and variations to SSAO roles: directing a functional area, serving as dean of students, and obtaining a doctorate. On average, career trajectories of SSAOs required roughly 20 years of experience to reach senior positions *(Biddix, 2011)*, and aspiring SSAOs moved an average of six times

and changed jobs every 3 to 4 years over the course of a career. When research on SSAOs is juxtaposed with what we know about CEP career trajectories, which is very little and primarily anecdotal, it is possible to see that a similar trajectory of career advancement may be required. The challenge lies in recognizing and charting the steps to reach the values-based and career-based goals CEPs pursue. In this, it would be useful to better understand the drivers associated with CEPs and how these drivers might inform their trajectory.

Faculty and Community Engagement

The robust scholarship on faculty in service-learning and community engagement (SLCE) also informs the current study of CEPs' long-term career objectives and the growing understanding of CEP practices, motivations, competencies, and experiences. During the first generation of community engagement in higher education, faculty were viewed as imperative to the practice, success, adoption, and future institutionalization of service-learning on campuses *(Bringle & Hatcher, 1995)*. Given the centrality of faculty in the widespread adoption of service-learning, researchers gained a clear understanding of what motivates faculty *(Bringle & Hatcher, 1995; O'Meara, 2008; O'Meara, Sandmann, Saltmarsh, & Giles, 2011)*; associated benefits of their engagement *(Hou & Wilder, 2015)*; effects of limiting and liberating structures (tenure, promotion, etc.; *O'Meara et al., 2011*); and practical elements, emotions, and challenges associated with their experiences *(Blakey, Theriot, Cazzell, & Sattler, 2015; Martin, Lecrom, & Lassiter, 2017)*. Scholars also identified informed practices and techniques to best facilitate faculty development for creating positive service-learning environments *(Bringle & Hatcher, 1995; Chamberlin & Phelps-Hillen, 2017; Clayton & O'Steen, 2010; Zlotkowski, 2002)*. As a field, we have spent nearly as much time and energy on understanding the impact on and experiences of faculty as we have understanding the impact on and experiences of students.

As community engagement in higher education continues the transition to a new generation, it is important that researchers seek to better understand the complexities of the professional roles and lives of CEPs. The second generation of this work, which is focused on a more transformational approach than the transactional set of functions associated with the first generation *(Dostilio & Perry, 2017; Welch & Saltmarsh, 2013)*, will require competent and well-supported CEPs. Understanding what drives these CEPs through the lens of long-term career objectives could help inform our under-

standing and shape approaches to professional preparation and development.

Research Methods

The purpose of this study is to examine long-term career objectives of CEPs. One descriptive and one exploratory research question guided the study. The descriptive question asked: What are the long-term career objectives of CEPs? The secondary, and exploratory, question asked: What factors may be influencing CEPs' long-term career objectives? Using consensual qualitative research (CQR), researchers sought to describe the long-term career objectives of CEPs and infer emergent career drivers informing professional pathways.

Data on long-term career objectives were derived from survey research (Duquesne University, IRB #2015/08/6) used to refine the preliminary competency model *(Dostilio et al., 2017)*. A total of 399 self-identified CEPs participated in the survey designed to name and refine the competencies necessary to effectively support and lead community engagement initiatives in American colleges and universities. In addition to a set of demographic questions, the instrument included 92 questions, grouped into six competency clusters identified in community engagement practice literature. Participants were asked to rate the degree to which they perceived a particular competency as of high, medium, or low importance on a scale of 0–100 ("not very important" to "very important"). In addition to competency ranking items, the survey posed numerous open-ended questions to CEPs. The survey question relevant to the current study asked: "What is your long-term career objective?" The data set included 314 individual responses, ranging in length from one to 71 words.

The average survey respondent from the sample of CEPs used to develop the preliminary competency model is White (88%), female (80%), aged early to mid 40s (46%), has earned a master's degree (58%), has worked as a community engagement professional for roughly 10 years (45%), and is housed within a unit dedicated specifically to community engagement efforts (85%). A majority of the respondents (60%) were responsible for the comprehensive support of community engagement across their institution, served in a nonfaculty role (80%), and reported to either academic or student affairs (38% and 35%, respectively).

The research design for the current study of long-term career objectives employed a qualitative team data analysis approach

known as CQR. As research team members, we self-identify as CEPs assuming hybrid faculty, doctoral student, and midcareer professional roles. CQR engages researchers in a deliberative process of consensus building to inductively code data *(Hill et al., 2005; Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997)*. We separately analyzed data using open coding followed by team meetings to identify emerging patterns and form representations of results. Next, an outside auditor reviewed the raw data and preliminary findings to minimize groupthink and provided written comments. The auditor brought relevant experience directing a campuswide SLCE center and contributed to development of the aforementioned preliminary competency model and. We then revisited preliminary study themes as a team using feedback from the auditing process and revised the findings in a continuation of the collective and iterative process.

Consistent with qualitative data analysis, the team of researchers served as human instruments for data collection *(Creswell, 2013)*. As such, we each maintained a journal to capture observations of the research process and personal reflections *(Chiseri-Strater & Sunstein, 2006)*. As researchers, our individual roles and shared professional identity as CEPs motivated our interests in investigating the challenges and opportunities that shape CEP career trajectories. Engagement with the CQR process also prompted us to wrestle with our own long-term career objectives, personal drivers that influence our professional trajectory, and roles as second-generation CEPs shaping future professional pathways.

Study Findings

Study findings are organized into two sections. The first section reviews descriptive statistics associated with the emergent categories of CEP respondents' long-term career objectives corresponding to Table 1. Emergent categories help frame the answer to RQ1: What are the long-term career objectives of CEPs? In turn, this information supports the representations of career drivers discussed in the second section and presented in Table 2, informed by participant responses and corresponding literature. Career drivers help frame the answer to RQ2: What factors may be influencing CEPs' long-term career objectives?

Emergent Categories of Long-Term Career Objectives

Emergent categories developed out of the 314 responses to the question "What is your long-term career objective?" Sample

CEP responses ranged from naming a particular position, role, or opportunity (e.g., dean of service-learning center, vice president of student affairs, senior administrator in higher education) to promoting the core values of the work (e.g., "to educate students how to be responsible [and] active citizens," "to work in partnership with others to create a more just and equitable world"). Identified categories reflected difficult decisions between staying in higher education or moving out, remaining in staff/administrative roles versus moving into faculty roles, moving up in position and responsibility to upper or midlevel leadership, and seeing long-term career objectives as rooted in personal and professional values. Table 1 summarizes emergent categories of CEP long-term career objectives and corresponding respondent percentages.

Table 1. Emergent Categories of Community Engagement Professionals' Long-Term Career Objectives

Categories of Long-Term Career Objectives	Percentage of Respondents*
Midlevel leadership (e.g., center director)	24%
Value (e.g., build field, improve human capacity, engage others in meaningful work)	22%
Unsure (e.g., uncertain, none)	14%
Continue role until retirement (e.g., continue as is for career, retirement)	13%
Upper level leadership (e.g., vice president, dean, president)	11%
Nonprofit (e.g., economic development, run a nonprofit)	9%
Faculty role (e.g., to be hybrid faculty, full-time tenure-track faculty)	8%
Percentages add up to 101% with rounding.	

Study data indicate a majority of CEPs' long-term career objectives are focused on continuing in their current position until retirement (13%) or obtaining a midlevel leadership position (24%), upper level leadership position (11%), or faculty role position within an institution (8%), meaning that a majority of the respondents considered their long-term career objective within the context of position or role within an institution (56%). Alternatively, 22% of the respondents considered their long-term career objective within a protean or values-driven context. These CEPs see their long-term career objective being focused and guided by the meaningful nature of the work they engage in (advancing justice, transforming higher education, facilitating meaningful work, building the field, improving human capacity, etc.) and the value they per-

sonally placed on it. Interestingly, 14% of CEPs gave responses such as "unsure," "wish [they] knew," "uncertain," or in a place where they "did not have an answer for this." The subset of respondents indicating they were unsure of their long-term career objective ($n = 50$) may be alluding to the lack of possibilities associated with CEP trajectories, which is of particular importance to the wider field, considering the growing nature of the profession in contrast to available opportunities for advancement.

Finally, additional responses listed a hybrid of types of work across the categories of long-term career objectives. Sample data include primarily teaching and administrative duties, including such responses as a "hybrid role with non-profit and university that includes teaching and research" or a "senior administrator in higher education with a faculty line."

Emergent Categories Informing Career Drivers

In conducting a second level of analysis, we began to identify key influences on CEP careers based on participant responses. These influences, or drivers, seemed to be the focus, source, or motivation that CEPs considered when responding to the survey's open-ended prompt regarding their long-term career objectives. In thematic coding, we inferred that participants were thinking about the question in notably different ways (e.g., as opportunities in the form of a position, commitment to a certain place, fulfillment of a personal call or personal values, dedication to the wider community engagement profession). We next describe each of the four emergent CEP career drivers in turn: opportunity- and role-based, values-based, place-based, and profession- and field-based (Table 2).

Opportunity- and role-based driver. The first CEP career driver focuses on advanced opportunities and roles with increased responsibility. CEP careers guided by opportunity or role assume a high level of professional mobility or willingness to change home institutions in seeking opportunities as they arise in an upward career trajectory *(Biddix, 2011, 2013)*. Long-term career objectives from participants that informed this driver included named college or university positions, such as president, vice president of student affairs, and director of service learning and community engagement. Other responses included advancement opportunities like "to move into a faculty role" or "aspire to have a senior cabinet position for community–campus relations." Across the body of

responses, the role or advancement opportunity is the central focus driving CEP career pathways.

Values-based driver. The second CEP career driver centers on CEPs who are living their personal values and purpose in and

Table 2. Model of Community Engagement Professional Career Drivers

Career Drivers	Driver Definitions	Participant Responses	Supporting Literature
Opportunity- & role-based driver	CEP long-term career objectives driven by promotion within their current institution or another, career trajectory, professional mobility, and position responsibilities	• "To become a Vice President of Student Affairs or President." • "Aspire to have a senior cabinet position for commu-nity–campus relations." • "To become Director of SLCE." • "To move into a faculty role."	Career paths of senior student affairs officers *(Biddix, 2011, 2013)*
Values-based driver	CEP long-term career objectives driven by intrinsic worth, meaning, and importance of intentional engagement with others through their work with students, faculty, staff, and community partners	• "To improve human capacity to solve public problems." • "To work in partnership with others to create a more just and equitable world." • "To make a meaningful contribution to social change." • "To continue to find work that is meaningful and has positive impact on communities."	Protean careers *(Briscoe & Hall, 2006; Hall, 2004)*

Place-based driver	CEP long-term career objectives driven by con-nectedness to a specific place, space, community, or geographic location, which has both physical and psychological connections	• "To help build and support Community Engagement vision at [University X]." • "To strengthen the community/ college connection with *this city*" [emphasis added]. • "To grow our service learning program here at [University X]."	Cosmopolitan/ local orientations *(Gouldner, 1957; Rhoades et al., 2008)*
Profession- & field-based driver	CEP long-term career objectives driven by purpose in the wider field of the public service mission of higher education and the emergent field of the CEP	• "To be part of a mission driven orga-nization that is advancing the public pur-pose of higher education." • "To work within higher education in civic engagement work." • "To advance higher education."	CEPs and public-service-oriented institutions & researchers *(Dostilio, 2017; Saltmarsh, Hartley, & Clayton, 2009)*

through their work as a CEP. It is important to note that this was the first point of observation in the CEP response about their long-term career objectives. CEP career objectives informed by values name the intrinsic worth and importance of intentional, recip-rocal engagement with others (students, faculty, staff, and com-munity partners) through their work, meaning the CEP career has greater purpose that extends beyond the individual and into the communal (similar to the concept of protean careers in *Briscoe & Hall, 2006*). For example, CEP responses associated with the values-based driver leaned first and foremost on the observation that their

work is fundamentally about "creat[ing] a more just and equitable world," "improv[ing] human capacity to solve public problems," and focused on "making meaningful contributions to social change."

Place-based driver. The third driver encompasses careers that inherently associate long-term career objectives with the place (campus, community, region, etc.) where CEPs do their work. In the career development literature, this idea is conceptualized as a career that is local, as opposed to cosmopolitan *(Gouldner, 1957; Rhoades et al., 2008).* This driver aligns with respondents who expressly designated the place and the people who populate that space as resources for identifying, addressing, and solving the challenges of that place. Their perspective on the purpose of their work seems to be focused by its connectedness to a specific place, space, community, or geographic location that has both physical and psychological connections. Sample CEP career objectives driven by a place-based perspective have explicit long-term goals that seek to "develop deeper and more sustainable relationships with [local] community partners," "strengthen the community/college connection with this city" [emphasis added], "help build and support the community engagement vision at [University Name]," and address "systemic issues in [their] community . . . holistically . . . with leadership from community members [through] campus community collaboration."

Profession- and field-based driver. The fourth and final CEP career driver emphasizes being motivated by purpose and a need for connection to the larger SLCE field and community *(Dostilio, 2017).* This alignment emerges from the greater mission of advancing the public purposes of higher education writ large *(Saltmarsh et al., 2009).* Example responses reflecting a desire to connect to the profession or field identify a long-term objective (and measure of success): "to work within higher education in civic engagement work," "to be a part of a mission driven organization that is advancing the public purpose of higher education," and "to advance higher education [generally]." This driver is situated in the development of CEP professional identity beyond campus and community. The effort to professionalize the field is based on informing, supporting, and shaping higher education and public service. As such, the field-based career driver may be rooted in the establishment of CEP professional identity beyond individual campuses and communities.

Emergent CEP career drivers provide useful observations about the pathways needed to support CEPs as they pursue long-term career goals within an evolving field and higher education landscape. As our focus turns toward a better understanding of the

CEP role, the field positions itself to better serve the professionals performing the campus- and community-level work. If in the first generation the CEP arrived on the scene and served as part of the supporting cast, in the second generation the CEP will be a key player and take center stage in the advancement of the field.

Discussion and Implications

Emergent CEP career drivers are situated in the context of long-term career objectives and inherently bound by perceived environmental conditions associated with the campus, community-based factors, and the field of higher education. The ebb, flow, and influence of the drivers appear to inform CEP journeys in navigating long-term career objectives. We next discuss potentially confounding and symbiotic relationships among the career drivers, then transition to a brief discussion of study limitations and suggest areas for future research.

Interplay of Career Drivers

Our findings illuminate the complicated and paradoxical nature of CEP career drivers worthy of discussion. For instance, study data indicate a potentially paradoxical relationship in being driven by place but also being driven by opportunity. As one participant noted, "I would like to see [University Name] grow to a place where I would be promoted to Vice President of Community Relations." The challenge lies at the confluence of these two drivers whereby the work of a CEP is rooted in place and therefore place-centric and, simultaneously, some CEP careers are driven by a commitment to opportunity advancement. As noted by Biddix *(2013)* in research on SSAOs, CEPs who are also opportunity driven could experience a tension in that following aspirations of greater responsibility may mean having to move away from a place to move up within an institution. Drivers of long-term CEP career objectives may therefore come into potential conflict with one another. Simply stated, how can a CEP's drivers be committed to place and at the same time be driven by opportunity?

Extending the paradoxical relationship between CEPs' being driven by the place-based and/or the opportunity-based driver is demonstrated by two of the functional areas documented in the preliminary competency model: cultivating high-quality partnerships *(Martin & Crossland, 2017)* and institutionalizing community engagement on a campus *(Weaver & Kellogg, 2017)*. As CEPs who have facilitated this work, we have experienced challenges in

developing effective types of partnerships (e.g., authentic, ongoing) within a community if the intention is to move on every 2 to 4 years (driven by opportunities or roles). As indicated in the competency model, this work demands self-awareness, knowledge of both institutional and community resources and opportunities, a consciousness of power relations and reputations in both the past and the present, and a commitment to building rapport and trust. Similar to high-quality partnerships, the institutionalization of community engagement requires an understanding of and ability to influence campus culture. This relational work does not happen overnight and demands strategic thinking, political awareness, relationship and coalition building, and outcomes rooted in evaluation and assessment that occur over time through sustained efforts. If a CEP career is highly driven by the opportunity-based driver, this could come into conflict with the place-based nature (and demands) of community engagement work.

Another example of how drivers interact is the potentially symbiotic relationship between place-based and values-based career drivers. Careers also seem to be driven by CEPs' values being lived and fulfilled through the place, institution, and communities they are serving. For example, one participant aspired to have a role in local politics as a means to highlight "the community's integration and commitment to sustainability and education." As noted previously, the values-based driver focuses on the intrinsic worth, meaning, and importance of the work that a CEP is pursuing. This particular driver is seemingly in alignment with the ideology that underpins the work of Campbell *(2008)* around calling and the concept of protean careers *(Briscoe & Hall, 2006)*. An explicitly values-based driver (considered internal motivation) and the place-based driver (considered external motivation) could present a supportive connection if the CEP is motivated by the place-based nature of their work. In other words, this interplay could lead to a complementary relationship if the CEP's values are rooted in the place-based nature of their work.

We are expressly seeking to understand the role each career driver might play in helping CEPs consider and manage their career pathways, goals, and expectations. The more clearly we can identify new and existing career trajectories within the field, the more informed and intentional we can all be in continuing to establish the professional role and advance the work we do collectively across higher education.

In contrast to the previous examples that highlight the interplay of the drivers for the individual CEP, there are potential impli-

cations that could inform both institutions of higher education and the wider SLCE field. Specifically within the context of higher education institutions, there should be intentional consideration on the interplay of these CEP career drivers and the hiring practices of institutions. Institutions' human resources offices could strategically consider and apply the drivers in the context of hiring decisions and pathways. Understanding that each CEP will come to this work on their respective campuses and in communities with an individualized balance of the identified drivers, it is imperative to consider the opportunities for strategically weighing these in the context of a CEP's experiences on campus. Considering the costs, lag times, and loss of institutional and community-based knowledge when employees (especially those whose profession is based on connecting with the community) move away to move up, having strategic hiring practices in place to ensure that the CEP career drivers are understood could potentially help sustain talent and reduce costs for institutions. This relationship, the one between employee retention and the CEP experience, is an area that could be further explored.

Additionally, it is important to consider how these drivers apply to and potentially inform the wider SLCE field. The competencies offered by Dostilio et al. *(2017)*, in alignment with the emergent drivers offered in this investigation, could work in tandem to prepare the field and organizations like Campus Compact, Imagining America, the International Association of Research on Service Learning and Community Engagement, and Gulf South Summit to develop CEPs as individuals and to inform institutions that highly value community engagement within their missions and practices. As we know, the SLCE field is only as strong, effective, and valuable as the sum of the CEPs' competence and commitment, the institution's culture and approach, and the community's awareness of and commitment to its role as a partner in community engagement.

Limitations and Future Research

The study poses numerous limitations that are important when considering the findings and identifying areas for future research. The study was limited by the nature of short participant responses to a single open-ended question ("What is your long-term career objective?"). Collected data on long-term career objectives were also disconnected from participant demographic information, meaning we conducted analysis on the body of responses rather than on an individual basis. Finally, as noted in the research methods, researchers are primary instruments of data analysis in

qualitative research (*Creswell, 2014).* In other words, data analysis took place within the socially constructed process of CQR, and our identities and experiences as CEPs informed the findings. Thus, our biases contributed to all stages of the research process, and the conclusions drawn from data analysis are our own.

Given these limitations, future research should interrogate the breadth and depth of existing career opportunities available to CEPs across the higher education landscape. For example, researchers could track colleges or universities offering senior-level positions focused on community engagement as the field continues to grow and evolve. It is also essential to better understand the environmental conditions of campuses that are facilitating long-term career options for CEPs that might be replicated across institutions or inform professional preparation. One challenge for community engagement as a field is the lack of racial diversity, a reality that was reflected in the demographic data used to inform this study. Additional studies might seek to understand how drivers are shaping who is attracted to the CEP field and how the field might cultivate a more diverse workforce. Moreover, the current study identified emerging drivers of CEP careers while looking across a body of participant responses. Future research can apply, problematize, or confound the drivers by considering individual-level career pathways and inviting CEPs to share their narrative accounts of long-term career objectives.

Conclusion

The future of the community engagement field is in the heads, hearts, and hands of current and future generations of CEPs. This study extends knowledge of the professional lives of CEPs by presenting emerging categories of long-term career objectives and drivers, or key influences, on career pathways. In order to understand the growing body of CEPs in higher education, research must interrogate not only the collective work of an evolving profession, but also the discernable career pathways available. Study findings offer the potential for CEPs to critically self-reflect on career drivers and consider ways to collectively advocate for one another within a changing higher education landscape. The better researchers can understand the responsibilities, challenges, and opportunities of CEPs, the more likely the field will not only continue to survive, but will thrive, as we navigate a second generation of our profession and look toward a third.

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About the Authors

Kira Pasquesi is the Leadership Studies Minor program director/instructor in the School of Education and CU Engage at the University of Colorado at Boulder. Her research interests unpacks the language of diversity and inclusion in college and university community engagement practices. She is a doctoral candidate in higher education and student affairs at the University of Iowa.

Lane Graves Perry, III currently serves as executive director of the Center for Community Engagement and Service Learning at Western Carolina University, a Carnegie Community Engaged campus. His reserch interests include community engagement/service-learning, global citizenship development, and public health. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Canterbury.

B. Tait Kellogg is a research affiliate with the Center for Public Service at Tulane University. Her research interests include community–campus partnerships, college access and persistence, and program evaluation. She is a doctoral student in the interdisciplinary City, Culture and Community program at Tulane University.

Leadership Practices for Place-Based Community Engagement Initiatives

Erica K. Yamamura and Kent Koth

Abstract

Place-based community engagement (PBCE) is a contemporary form of community engagement gaining popularity throughout the United States. PBCE provides a comprehensive strategy for universities and communities to more democratically partner with each other through long-term efforts focused on distinct geographic areas. Drawing from one-on-one interviews, focus groups, and observational data, this research examined the leadership at five institutions currently engaged in PBCE. In particular, this research involved an analysis of the leadership role of community engagement professionals within a framework of the five elements of PBCE *(Yamamura & Koth, 2018)*. Findings revealed three leadership competency areas for community engagement professionals: (1) Managing geographies of place and space, (2) actualizing a 50/50 approach to community and university impact, and (3) leading with multicultural competency and inclusion. The findings illuminate the need for stronger training and development in these areas, especially for institutions that seek to start a PBCE initiative. *Keywords:* leadership, place-based

Introduction

*T*he field of community engagement in higher education is evolving at a rapid pace that reflects the maturity of the field; the rapid changes in higher education; and the dramatic cultural, political, and social shifts occurring in the United States. With this rapid evolution, community engagement professionals (CEPs) at every positional level need to continue to learn new skills, attributes, and competencies in order to lead ethically and effectively. In this article we make distinctions between positional leadership with the CEP model, in particular with CEP directors versus CEP staff members. We make this distinction because a CEP director often, though not always, leads PBCE. The preliminary competency model for community engagement professionals *(Dostilio, 2017b)* provides an extensive set of competencies to assist CEPs in navigating the shifting landscape they encounter on campus and in the community. Yet, as Dostilio *(2017)* note, the ever-evolving nature of the community engagement field calls for

revisiting the competency model to deepen and expand key considerations for community engagement professionals.

The growing use of place-based community engagement in higher education and the skills needed to lead and work within this subfield of community engagement invite community engagement professionals to further develop competencies in several significant areas that are less conspicuous in the current competency model. Most notably, place-based community engagement calls for community engagement professionals to center efforts deeply, cooperatively, and in innovative ways in a particular geographic area.

Drawing upon a recent research study and book on place-based community engagement in higher education *(Yamamura & Koth, 2018)*, this article illuminates three significant emerging leadership competencies for CEPs involved in place-based community engagement (PBCE): (1) centralizing geographies of place and space for community, (2) actualizing a 50/50 approach to community and university impact, and (3) leading with multicultural competency and inclusion. Although perhaps most salient to professionals involved in facilitating place-based community engagement, these emerging competencies can inform all CEPs, regardless of position and engagement approach, as they probe the outer edges of the community engagement field.

Literature Review

Although the community engagement field is over 40 years old, very little research has focused on the leadership and professional competencies in this area. In the past 5 years, practitioners and researchers have increased attention on the leadership and administration of community engagement *(Dostilio, 2017b; Post, Ward, Longo, & Saltmarsh, 2016; Welch, 2016)*. Welch's *(2016)* book provides university–community engagement leaders with research-based structures and practices to enhance their work, in particular for institutions that seek to prepare for and/or align their practices with the national Carnegie Classification in Community Engagement. Post et al.'s *(2016)* work provides the context and history of key thinkers and researchers in community engagement in higher education. Contributors to this work articulate the concept of next-generation community engagement professionals who are more diverse and can be scholar-practitioners as well as nonacademic knowledge experts. Dostilio *(2017b)* build upon this new research by codifying the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to lead and facilitate community engagement efforts in higher education.

Taken together, these works suggest maturation of, and a movement toward professional standards for, the field.

Another recent evolution within the field of community engagement in higher education is an increased intentional focus on place. Place is not a new concept in education. Public K-12 educational systems have always been place-centered in the United States, with one's home address often determining the schools one attends. K-12 schools have historically had a variety of community engagement partnership models with families, community organizations, higher education, and philanthropy *(Guajardo, Guajardo, Janson, & Militello, 2016; Martinez-Cosio & Bussell, 2013)*. In recent years the Harlem Children's Zone has provided a significant model of the development of an intensive place-based pathway of educational and social support to improve outcomes for youth in Harlem, a historically working-class African American neighborhood *(Tough, 2009)*.

Focusing on place in higher education is growing in popularity, with multiple institutions of higher education utilizing a paradigm of place to guide their community engagement strategy. For example, numerous institutions of higher education are embracing their role as an anchor institution to situate themselves within the context of a local community *(Harris & Pickron-Davis, 2013; Hodges & Dubb, 2012; Percy, Zimpher, & Brukardt, 2006)*. The Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities and the Democracy Collaborative are currently working with 31 colleges and universities to identify resources and develop new tools for implementing, expanding, and evaluating anchor mission practices within their institutions, higher education, and the communities they serve *(Democracy Collaborative, 2017)*. Another example of the burgeoning focus on place in higher education is the University of Oregon's Sustainable City Year Program *(https://sci.uoregon.edu/)*, which matches university students with one Oregon city for an entire year. Other universities are drawing upon the model to positively impact municipalities in their geographic regions.

Neighborhood-based approaches to educational partnerships, particularly approaches that focus on the assets of the community to improve social and educational outcomes, are yet another example of the growing emphasis on place *(Dostilio, 2017a; Guajardo et al., 2016; McKnight & Block, 2010)*. McKnight and Block *(2010)* call for partnerships that focus on community assets that form building blocks for neighborhood development. More specifically in higher education, Dostilio *(2017a)* shares her research on "neighborhood emplaced centers," in which she profiles four universities that are

engaged in high-quality and deep relationships with their local communities. A key distinction Dostilio makes is between being *in* a place ("place-based") and *of* a place (what she calls "being emplaced"). Another neighborhood-based approach is Guajardo et al.'s *(2016)* community-based work known as the Community Learning Exchange, in which they use introspective and narrative methods (storytelling and dynamic reflections) to engage with and for community. A key strength of this approach is the deep individual, community, and collective layers of understanding that are explored to connect with each other and empower the community, especially in racially diverse and marginalized communities.

Place-Based Community Engagement Framework

Curious about the burgeoning focus on place in higher education, particularly within the field of community engagement, we embarked on a research study to better understand the lessons arising from universities with a proven commitment to place-based community engagement. In our study we defined place-based community engagement (PBCE) in higher education as a long-term, university-wide commitment to partner with local residents, organizations, and other leaders to focus equally on campus and community impact within a clearly defined geographic area. This definition of PBCE includes a number of key components:

1. a geographically defined focus,
2. equal emphasis on campus and community (50/50 proposition),
3. long-term vision and commitment,
4. university-wide engagement that animates the mission and develops the institution, and
5. drawing upon collective impact *(Yamamura & Koth, 2018)*.

Most institutions of higher education have a dispersed approach to community engagement, often directing resources to dozens of projects and in multiple local, regional, and international locations. PBCE intentionally emphasizes a local geographic focus with clearly defined boundaries. Moreover, in what we've termed the 50/50 proposition, PBCE also places an equal emphasis on campus and community impact. This is a departure from the practices and infrastructure that frequently emphasize

campus impact (student learning outcomes, faculty engagement, etc.) over community impact. Recognizing that significant change takes time and deep investments in relationships, PBCE focuses on long-term, multiyear commitments from all parties. In addition, PBCE, when fully actualized, is a university-wide strategy that animates the university mission. For example, at Jesuit institutions this provides an opportunity for enhancing mission-aligned social justice opportunities for students. At public institutions, this may help develop the university engagement policy with faculty research and clinical experiences. Finally, PBCE is a communal effort and draws upon the concept of collective impact. Common elements of the collective impact approach include a common agenda, shared measurement system, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and a backbone support organization *(Kania & Kramer, 2011)*. Institutions of higher education pursuing PBCE may take on the role of backbone organization for the collective impact approach.

As noted above, when embraced fully PBCE differs significantly from the most popular and predominant community engagement approaches in higher education. Leading and working within a PBCE initiative thus calls for drawing upon the common set of competencies presented by Dostilio *(2017)*, as well as a distinct set of additional leadership skills, philosophies, and attributes. Utilizing our *(Yamamura & Koth, 2018)* place-based community engagement framework, we explored this question: What are the competencies for leading a place-based initiative? Our study allowed us to observe and engage with numerous leaders of place-based community engagement, which enabled us to begin to surface competencies for leading these complex efforts.

Methodology

Data Collection

This article draws upon a larger study that examined place-based community engagement in practice at five institutions. In the larger study, we conducted site visits and a number of focus groups, group conversations, and one-on-one interviews with a variety of stakeholders. In total, we collected qualitative data from approximately 190 stakeholders, including 50 staff members of place-based initiatives, 55 on-campus stakeholders (faculty, noninitiative staff, and students), and 85 community partners. For this study, we will utilize data that speaks to CEPs.

Data Analysis

We began with an open coding process *(Creswell, 2014)* high-lighting narratives focused on CEPs. Thereafter, we completed thematic coding of our transcript and on-site field notes by examining five components of place-based community engagement and the role of CEPs in their respective initiatives. Three areas that are complementary to the Dostilio *(2017)* CEP competency model emerged. For trustworthiness, we engaged in a peer debriefing process to illuminate biases and assess clarity and strength of the themes *(Creswell, 2014)*.

Place-Based Initiatives

Drawing from over 35 institutions performing place-specific community engagement work, we examined mature place-based initiatives in five institutions of higher education: Drexel University, Loyola University Maryland, San Diego State University, Seattle University, and the University of San Diego. Each initiative engages a local geographic area with structural and programmatic components that are developed to support communities in the long term. A brief description of each initiative is provided below.

Drexel University. Drexel is focused on the Powelton Village and Mantua neighborhoods that are adjacent to the university. Some distinctive components include their Federal Promise Zone designation in collaboration with the City of Philadelphia, a local school district, and other community organizations; their Dornsife Center, which serves as an extension center for the university; and their curricular engagement, with a required University 101 course for all undergraduates.

Loyola University Maryland. Loyola's York Road Initiative is centered on the York Road Corridor in Northern Baltimore, a historical corridor for the area. Key elements include their Loyola Clinical Centers, partnerships with the local school district, and their unique farmers market that provides fresh produce to the local community.

San Diego State University. San Diego State University's over two-decades-long P-20 college access partnerships with Price Philanthropies and the San Diego Unified School District is the longest-lived formal place-based initiative. Unique components include their College Avenue Compact program, which provides precollege and wraparound services for P-20 college success, their "schools in the park" curricular model, and clinical graduate training programs at an extension center in the community.

Seattle University. Seattle University's Youth Initiative (SUYI) is focused on the communities in the Central District, Yesler Terrace, and the International District that surround the institution. Notable features include a Choice Neighborhood Grant with the Seattle Housing Authority, strong partnership with Seattle Public Schools (especially schools in their catchment area), and their role as a convener of other institutions and organizations seeking to engage in place-based community engagement.

University of San Diego. The University of San Diego's anchor and place-based initiative is focused on the Linda Vista neighborhood, which is located east of the university. The university has a history of strong partnerships with community organizations that their recently formalized anchor and place-based work has deepened. Similar to other campuses doing this work, they have had strong partnerships with local schools and the Bayside Community Center. Their strong curricular training of their undergraduate leaders and students centralizes identity development, multicultural competency, and servant leader for marginalized communities.

It is important to note that all of the initiatives had K-12 educational partners. Partnerships with schools and school districts allowed universities the opportunity to create substantive P-20 partnerships and to enhance college access, including to their institution.

Findings

Through our research we identified three key competency areas central to CEP leadership of a PBCE initiative: (1) centralizing geographies of place and space for community, (2) actualizing a 50/50 approach to community and university impact, and (3) leading with multicultural competency and inclusion.

Centralizing Geographies of Place and Space for Community

The current CEP competencies do not acknowledge or centralize place or space within the framework. However, all of the place-based initiatives did so with intentionality and long-term commitments to the communities.

Proximity. All five of the institutions identified a geographical region that was in close proximity to the campus to develop deep, mutually beneficial partnerships with the community (and enhance existing ones). For university leadership and CEPs, the process of identifying these locations often involved careful plan-

ning (Seattle University and Loyola Maryland) and significant diplomacy (Drexel and San Diego State University).

Socioeconomic challenges. Each of the geographical areas linked to the universities in our study has historical and contemporary economic and social challenges as well as community assets that are acknowledged and built upon. Drexel University and Loyola University Maryland both partner with African American communities. San Diego State University and the University of San Diego partner with communities consisting of immigrants from multiple countries. Seattle University's partner communities benefit from having both a historic African American community and immigrant (Chinese, Japanese, Somali, and Vietnamese) communities. CEPs involved in launching and sustaining their PBCE initiatives demonstrated significant acumen in bridging their historically White institutions with these culturally, racially, and economically diverse communities.

Collaborative priorities. The CEPs worked collaboratively with campus and community partners to identify needs, assets, and strategies to improve community outcomes in their respective geographic areas. However, the process and practice of these CEP leaders looked different depending on the respective campus's approach to developing their PBCE. Several of the campuses took a more formal approach to building campus and community collaborations. For example, Seattle University engaged in a multiyear planning process starting with senior campus leadership (non-CEPs) and a CEP executive director visiting different campuses and facilitating a formal campuswide task force. Loyola University Maryland also had a yearlong "year of listening," which provided the basis of their planning process. In contrast, San Diego State University did not pursue as formal a process and relied on the expertise and research of their philanthropic partner, Price Philanthropies, which had already committed to community development of their geographical area, City Heights. Finally, the University of San Diego pursued more of an organic multiyear process of growing out partnerships that culminated in their PBCE in the neighborhood of Linda Vista. Despite the vast differences in planning processes, the critical skills for the CEPs involved in all five initiatives were the ability to listen, to facilitate complex multipartner conversations, and to move groups toward a shared vision of focusing on place.

Physical meeting space. The CEPs leading and supporting their respective PBCE initiatives strategically developed and used spaces on campus and in the community to provide dynamic

sites of collaboration and learning. Drexel University and Loyola Maryland both developed off-campus spaces that gave faculty an opportunity to provide services to the community through offering clinical training of their graduate students. The University of San Diego's key community partner, Bayside Community Center, worked closely with the campus to build a produce patch at their community center and host a multicultural farmers market in the community.

Physical office space. In addition to meeting spaces, CEPs also worked to recenter physical office spaces in the interest of community visibility and partnership. For example, Seattle University and Loyola University Maryland located their community engagement office space within their geographic focus areas in order to increase access and visibility of their partnership within their communities. In moving their office spaces, the CEPs at Seattle University and Loyola Maryland had to balance the polarity of remaining connected to campus and becoming more accessible to the community.

Actualizing a 50/50 Approach to Community and University Impact

In addition to centering geographic space and place, CEPs leading PBCE initiatives also embraced the opportunities and tensions of the 50/50 approach, focusing equally on campus and community impact. As noted previously, pursuing an equal emphasis on campus and community impact departs from the predominant approach to community engagement in higher education, which tends to significantly emphasize student learning with less attention paid to community impact. In utilizing the 50/50 approach, the CEP leaders within our study (1) hired external-facing CEP staff, (2) significantly incorporated community voice, (3) pursued curricular innovation, and (4) emphasized assessment and evaluation of community impact.

Hiring external-facing staff. Recognizing the importance of developing thoughtful strategies to pursue community impact, a number of the CEP leaders within our study created new CEP positions with an external-facing portfolio. Drexel University created an executive director for their off-campus community engagement space (the Dornsife Center), Seattle University established a director of community partnerships, and the University of San Diego created a director of their community-based youth program. CEPs in these positions spend most of their time off campus pursuing intensive community partnership work. Two universities took the

50/50 approach even further by creating university staff positions that spent all of their time at community partner sites. The CEP leadership at Seattle University created multiple positions located on their elementary and middle school sites. During their 20 years of partnering in the City Heights neighborhood, San Diego State University has had a number of university staff members who spent all of their time at partner elementary, middle, and high schools. In creating these external-facing and externally located positions, the CEPs leading place-based engagement at their institutions demonstrated tremendous political and financial acumen.

Community voice. The actualization of the 50/50 approach requires creating mechanisms to give community leaders and members more voice and influence. One way in which CEPs leading place-based initiatives effected greater community voice and impact was through creating community engagement advisory boards. For example, Seattle University's place-based initiative received strategic and financial input from community partners serving on two distinct boards. In addition, CEPs, especially executive directors and external-facing staff, also served on a variety of community-based advisory boards.

Curricular innovation. Curricular innovation in which community members took courses on campus was yet another area of the 50/50 campus and community impact approach in practice. At Drexel University and the University of San Diego, CEP leaders created new structures offering community members opportunities to take university courses. Drexel offers "side-by-side" classes that allow community members to take university courses alongside university students at no cost. The University of San Diego has piloted a similar opportunity with community members.

Assessment and evaluation. Finally, CEPs within the initiatives we examined also placed significant emphasis on the assessment and evaluation of community impact outcomes. Although all the CEP leaders spoke of the importance of community impact, CEP leadership at Seattle University and Drexel University frequently measured the impact of various community metrics associated with their place-based initiatives. Utilizing funds from a federal grant, Seattle University even hired an internal assessment and evaluation analyst to measure and track community impact outcomes, especially with their partnership schools.

Leading With Multicultural Competency and Inclusion

All of the higher education institutions examined in this article are majority White institutions that serve majority non-White communities. Four of the five initiative directors are also White. Although race is not the only component of multicultural competency and inclusion, it is an important one in higher education and U.S. society today. Even though attention to multicultural competency and inclusion is often a student training concern for CEPs, our research revealed that CEPs pursued even more robust and dynamic practices within PBCE initiatives.

Multicultural competency. All of the PBCE initiatives explored and uncovered the racial and socioeconomic histories and contemporary context of their respective neighborhoods, including systematic exclusion, discrimination, and prior negative relationships with the institution. CEP leaders from Drexel and San Diego State developed awareness of cultural and racial dynamics through community meetings and meetings with community partners. CEP leaders at Loyola University Maryland, Seattle University, and the University of San Diego utilized more on-the-ground approaches to learning their community context and educating their staff, faculty, and students. These institutions used immersive experiences that involved multiple day visits in the community to hear stories, share perspectives, and, as one director put it, "break bread" together. These experiences significantly informed the strategies and partnerships of the place-based initiatives. In addition, such opportunities also provided important information that is often visible to or "understood" by community members but perplexing for privileged college students, faculty, and staff—many of whom assume their own experience of living in middle-class, racially homogenous, and economically affluent communities is universal.

Individual identity development (race, class, gender, immigration status, etc.) is a critical part of PBCE work—this developmental work is required of all parties, including staff, faculty, students, and even community partners. This work was most often brought up with CEPs of Color who were typically charged with performing it. Some of the White CEP directors were also actively engaged in this work, but not the majority. To engage campus and community members, CEPs used storytelling and counternarratives that provided asset-based perspectives on stereotypical views of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation. Two CEP directors of PBCE initiatives and one community partner also shared their own experiences as university alumni; some also included the relevant

experience of having been raised in the communities in which they now work. When CEP directors did not have the training or skill set to do this work, consultants were brought in to train faculty, students, and staff.

Inclusion. Although frequently utilizing different tactics, all of the campuses in our study pursued strategies to foster inclusion. For example, several institutions used trainings and professional development to foster inclusion. CEPs at Seattle University have focused their efforts on racial justice, including training for staff and students, as well as work with the community. CEPs at the University of San Diego partnered with faculty to incorporate into courses the exploration of individual identities, antiracist leadership, and advocacy for racial and social justice.

CEPs at several institutions piloted inclusive practices through staffing. For example, CEPs incorporated community visits and interviews with community partners into interview and search processes for new staff. The University of San Diego CEPs were atypically inclusive and multicultural in this regard in that the majority of their CEPs are people of Color and hold other marginalized identities (first generation, veteran, low income, etc.). In addition, some White CEP directors who have access to privileged spaces on campus or with community organizations have mentored their staff of Color to socialize them into these predominantly White, male, and privileged spaces. One benefit identified by a CEP PBCE initiative director is that such opportunities provided partners with privilege an opportunity to see these CEPs of Color as leaders.

Implications for Research and Practice

PBCE brings forth another dimension to community engagement work in higher education: centering efforts deeply, cooperatively, and innovatively in a particular geographic area. As our findings suggest, for CEPs who seek to lead such initiatives, this work is multidimensional at the institution and in the community—with new ways of thinking and working internally with staff and on-campus stakeholders, as well as with community partners.

The findings suggest that place-based work requires intentional community representation and engagement embedded in university structures, spaces, practices, and staffing. Symbolically interacting or providing unidirectional service is a transactional community exchange and not genuine partnership and engagement. As our study illuminates, with intentionality, collaboration, and some ingenuity, CEPs can maximize their institutions' positive impact on

a particular geographic area. Place-based initiatives require CEPs to question assumptions about power, privilege, space, and place in deep and meaningful ways. In some instances CEPs must reimagine traditional systems and structures (office space, physical space, etc.) in college service and community engagement offices. Other aspects require changes in approach and behavior: active listening, focusing on trust building, and treating community partners as knowledgeable and valuable stakeholders, even if they do not have the professional experience or college degrees to give them traditional legitimacy in the higher education setting.

For CEPs involved in place-based community engagement, the focus on a distinct geography means staying connected to the local context in new and challenging ways. For example, if an initiative is focused on the geography of a particular school feeder pattern (elementary, middle, and high school) and the school boundaries shift, CEPs will need to pursue creative new approaches to engaging place. If the CEPs were not involved in a place-based initiative, they could simply move efforts to another school district or system quite easily. Given the long-term nature of place-based work, CEPs must demonstrate adaptive leadership, strong political acumen, and continuous learning.

Moving toward a 50/50 approach to university and community impact is likely to be the most difficult proposition for CEPs involved in PBCE. At present, many community engagement offices claim to be 50/50 in their campus and community impact. However, closer examination of structures, services, and outcomes usually demonstrates a much greater emphasis on campus and over community. The 50/50 approach requires an overhaul of a core value that has led to these programs' historical emphasis on colleges and college students. As the experiences of the institutions in our study suggest, when CEPs empower communities and value community impact, and when they employ strategies that reflect these values in hiring, curriculum development, evaluation, and incorporating community voice, deeper and much more authentic partnerships become possible.

Finally, as presented above, exercising multicultural competency and embracing practices of inclusion are essential leadership skills for CEPs. Service and community engagement offices in higher education seem to be slower to diversify than other areas of campus, such as student affairs. The field of community engagement must attend to this area to strengthen partnerships and avoid the damaging effects of "White saviors" *(Mitchell, Donahue, & Young-Law, 2012)*. White CEPs, particularly those leading PBCE

initiatives, need to move with urgency and clarity, with a focus on individual work to explore how the lens and paradigm of Whiteness may inhibit growth and positive impact.

More resources must arise to assist CEPs in leading for diversity and inclusion. Many professional associations have training or preparation programs to diversify their leadership ranks—organizations like Campus Compact and the International Association for Research on Service Learning and Community Engagement (IARSLCE) have the potential to positively impact the field in this area. The field would also move toward greater inclusion if narratives of CEP experiences from racially diverse and underrepresented communities, such as Gonzalez and Padilla's *(2008)* work on Latinx higher education professionals' community engagement, had a more central place in our professional practice.

Limitations

Although our research provides some starting points by highlighting competencies for CEPs doing place-based work, a few notable limitations exist. One limitation was our focus on place-based initiatives that had reached a state of maturation. More research is needed on emerging, and even unsuccessful, place-based initiatives to gain a comprehensive understanding of CEP knowledge, competencies, dispositions, and critical commitments. In addition, many of the institutions that are pursuing a place-based strategy are also anchor institutions and/or utilizing anchor institution principles to inform their work. The skills and competencies needed to lead place-based and anchor institution development is another area that could benefit from further research. Finally, within the place-based context, exploring the varying professional experiences of CEPs of Color vis-à-vis White CEPs might provide more insight into strategies and tools to make place-based community engagement more successful and, perhaps just as important, diversify the wider field of community engagement.

Conclusion

In Katz and Nowak's (2018) recent book *The New Localism*, the authors observe that power is shifting downward from the federal government to states and local municipalities. They provide evidence that real power to create change lies in creative local alliances that focus on specific neighborhoods, towns, and cities. As this shift in power occurs, universities can play a significant role in creating positive change in their local communities. Place-based

community engagement, while calling for modifications in how universities engage their communities, offers great promise for the campus and community.

Since place-based community engagement is a new and evolving subfield within the field of community engagement in higher education, there is not a fully refined leadership playbook for facilitating these complex efforts. The work of leading place-based community engagement requires continuous learning, political acumen, and a multidimensional skill set.

This article explored several significant emerging competencies that community engagement professionals need to facilitate place-based strategies in higher education. By centralizing geographies of place and space for community, actualizing a 50/50 approach to community and university impact, and leading with multicultural competency and inclusion, community engagement professionals can harness the potential of higher education to make meaningful long-term change on campus and in local communities. In modeling this emergent form of leadership, these community engagement professionals can also impact community engagement professionals within the wider field of community engagement. In this way, leading hyperlocal community engagement efforts can impact not just local communities but the nation.

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About the Authors

Erica K. Yamamura is the program director and an associate professor in the Student Development Administration Program in the College of Education at Seattle University. Her research interests include P-20 educational equity and diversity and inclusion in higher education. She received her Ph.D. in higher education and organizational change from the University of California, Los Angeles.

Kent Koth is the founding executive director of the Seattle University Center for Community Engagement. His interest is in leading an effort to create a national network of universities pursuing place-based community engagement. He received his M.A. in religion from the Pacific School of Religion.

Strategic Action: Community Engagement Professionals as Institutional Change Leaders

Ashley Farmer-Hanson, Julianne Gassman,
and Emily Shields

Abstract

This research study analyzed the role of CEPs in strategic planning processes by examining the use of the civic action plan *(Campus Compact, 2018).* To ascertain whether institution-wide planning efforts around civic and community engagement create new opportunities for CEPs to take on institutional leadership roles, we interviewed CEPs who were involved in creating civic action plans at their campuses and examined their role in plan development, the competencies most utilized in that process, and the most important support for building competencies and framing the change process. These interviews gave new insights into how strategic planning processes have contributed to the growth, development, and elevation of the role of CEPs on campus and the types of support structures they found valuable. The conclusions will inform future planning work by CEPs and support for that work by organizations. We make preliminary recommendations for change, process accountability, development, and future research.

Keywords: community engagement professionals, higher education, strategic planning, change agents

Introduction

*C*ommunity engagement professionals (CEPs) are beginning to receive recognition in higher education as a class of professional staff dedicated to building community and campus partnerships in a variety of ways that contribute to institutional and community goals *(Dostilio & McReynolds, 2015; Jacoby & Mustascio, 2010; McReynolds & Shields, 2015).* Although the field is beginning to learn more about the meaning of this professional role and how to best support it, there is still little known about how these professionals influence the strategic direction of institutions. Indeed, there is still less known about whether institutions are developing strategic directions for community engagement at all.

In 2016, Campus Compact, a national organization dedicated to advancing "the public purposes of over 1,000 colleges and universities by deepening their ability to improve community life and to educate students for civic and social responsibility" *(Campus*

Compact, n.d.), sought to increase the level of strategic planning taking place around civic and community engagement through the civic action statement and planning process. College and university presidents from across the country signed onto the statement, committing to create a public civic action plan for the respective institutions. Several colleges and universities have now completed and shared these plans online. Researchers sought to use this initiative to find examples of institution-wide strategic planning for community engagement to examine the role of CEPs in the process.

This single case study includes five examples of CEPs' engagement in and leadership of strategic planning. The purpose of this case study is to provide insight into the role of CEPs, including the skills, abilities, and knowledge they used in the strategic planning process and the factors that most contributed to their competency in these areas. The presentation of the case study is followed by an analysis of themes and trends and a discussion of what these findings might mean for the field of higher education community engagement in terms of how it supports professionals and their development and encourages institution-wide planning efforts.

Literature Review

CEPs have been on college campuses for quite some time, but the field has had challenges in defining their role and identifying competencies that make the professional. Dostilio *(2017)* defined CEPs as "professional staff whose primary job is to support and administer community–campus engagement" *(p. 1)*. These individuals build relationships with almost every constituent on campus and in the community. In the case of building strategic plans for these efforts, they may be trusted with strategic leadership and serving as organizational managers *(McReynolds & Shields, 2015)*. They lead colleagues in assessing current practices while striving to be institutional change leaders.

Strategic planning is instrumental to a CEP's role *(Dostilio, 2017)*. Strategic planning can be defined as "a deliberative, disciplined approach to producing fundamental decisions and action that shape and guide what an organization (or other entity) is, what it does, and why" *(Bryson, 2018, p. 8)*. Higher education engages in strategic planning to continue to meet the demands of higher education in new ways *(Lerner, 1999)*. The changing demographics, decline in federal and state dollars, and new educational models are examples of why it's necessary for institutions to be strategic in their planning and to consider new approaches. Strategic planning

provides an avenue for universities "to adapt to the rapidly shifting environment" *(Rowley, Lujan, & Dolence, 1997)*. This form of planning includes conducting an environmental scan, a gap analysis, and benchmarking to set goals *(Lerner, 1999)*. Whereas conventional planning puts an emphasis on immediate problems and their solutions, strategic planning involves forward thinking. Strategic planning provides a platform for campuses to analyze their current operations, outline their vision for the future, and create strategies and pathways that align with future aspirations *(Rowley et al., 1997)*. The kind of thinking and planning needed to address the campus of the future creates deeper and more meaningful levels of change. The strategic plan becomes a guide for organizational decisions *(Lerner, 1999)*.

There is very little information about institutional strategic planning for community engagement or the role of CEPs in that process. Despite the multiple ways in which CEPs are expected to assess programs that require skills such as tracking, documenting, and evaluating, there is little reference to the actual training and development of CEPs to prepare them for this work *(Dostilio, 2017)*. McReynolds & Shields *(2015)* argue that CEPs must have the skills to evaluate the institution and collaborate with others in order for community engagement to be institutionalized on their campuses, but there is little reference to where the CEP might develop these skills essential to their work. CEPs are often expected to conduct assessments on campus for program reviews, awards, and other recognition programs such as the Carnegie Classification in Community Engagement.

When reviewing the competencies included in the preliminary competency model *(Dostilio et al., 2017)*, the following knowledge, skills, dispositions, and critical commitments are well-suited to support strategic planning *(pp. 46–51)*:

- Knowledge of assessment and evaluation methods; able to assess and evaluate impact of community engagement on its stakeholders (e.g., students, faculty, communities, institution)
- Knowledge of community-engaged pedagogies, including history, methods, underlying theories, and community challenges that may be addressed through community-engaged pedagogies scholarship
- Knowledge of context: of self, of institution, of environments external to institution, of history of engagement

- Knowledge of institutional policies that may affect community engagement (e.g., faculty handbook, student handbook)
- Able to collaborate and work across role and disciplinary silos (skill)
- Able to cultivate and maintain relationships (skill)
- Able to collect and analyze data (skill)
- Able to assess and evaluate impact of community engagement on its stakeholders (skill)
- Able to communicate effectively (skill)
- Embrace critical thinking (disposition)
- Embrace visionary thinking (disposition)
- Committed to dialogue with communities (critical commitment)
- Able to unveil and disrupt unequal power structures (critical commitment)
- Able to recognize one's subject position in connection to privilege and oppression (critical commitment)
- Able to name injustices and power differentials (critical commitment)

Dostilio *(2017)* found that a CEP must have administrative knowledge, skills, abilities, and dispositions that are developed at a higher level to work with multiple constituents to advance this work. In this case, strategic planning was not addressed specifically, but assessment and relationship development and critical thinking skills were included. Strategic planning, assessment, and analysis are essential for a CEP to move their campus to a higher and more significant level of engagement. Additionally, McReynolds and Shields *(2015)* suggested the development of an assessment committee as one way that CEPs can start to map out their institutions' impact and develop strategies for moving their programs forward.

Resources are available to help guide institutions and CEPs in creating strategic direction, such as Furco's *(1999)* self-assessment rubric for the institutionalization of service-learning and Holland's *(1997)* matrix of institutional commitment to service. However, to date there has been limited comprehensive guidance on how to create a strategic plan for community engagement. In 2016, Campus Compact asked member campuses to reaffirm their commitment to community engagement by having presidents sign on in support of their Thirtieth Anniversary Action Statement. The

statement also committed leaders to creating and sharing a plan: "Our Civic Action Plans will state the actions our campuses will take as we move forward with a renewed sense of urgency, along with the impacts we expect to achieve" *(Campus Compact, 2016, para. 15)*. As of August 2018, 110 of these plans had been submitted and shared publicly on the Campus Compact website *(Campus Compact, 2018)*.

Study Context

Since the Campus Compact Thirtieth Anniversary Action Statement's creation, more than 450 college and university presidents and chancellors have signed onto the statement. Of these, 110 (or about 25%) have submitted completed civic action plans to a publicly available database on the Campus Compact website at compact.org.

This is not the only initiative for strategic, institution-wide community engagement, and there are certainly other ways institutions have chosen to create strategies for these efforts. This is, however, the largest publicly available database of such plans. For this reason, it served as the main source of information for this study. Researchers reviewed these plans, looking for those that identified a planning team that appeared to include at least one individual who might be a CEP. Researchers then sought to find willing study participants from among these professionals who represented a range of institution types and geographic locations.

Methods

This research utilized a case study methodology *(Yin, 2002)* to understand the role of CEPs in supporting and leading institution-wide strategic planning. The researchers aimed to characterize the knowledge, skills, abilities, and dispositions of the CEPs that supported their ability to participate in the strategic planning and to describe how those competencies developed during their career. Qualitative inquiry and the use of a case study method was most appropriate, as this research design focuses on complexity and helps advance the understanding of people and programs, supporting focus on a unique interest *(Stake, 1995)*. Glesne and Peshkin *(1992)* stated,

> The openness of qualitative inquiry allows the researcher to approach the inherent complexity of social interaction and to do justice to that complexity, to respect it

in its own right. Qualitative researchers avoid simplifying social phenomena and instead explore the range of behavior and expand their understanding of the resulting interactions. Throughout the research process, they assume that social interaction is complex and that they will uncover some of the complexity. *(p. 7)*

Yin *(2014)*, Stake *(1995)*, and Merriam *(2009)*, the three seminal authors of case study research *(Yazan, 2015)*, outline the uses and methodological characteristics of this methodology, noting that it allows for focus on a particular case, recognizing the complexity of what is being studied and the need for descriptive analysis. Yin *(2002)* outlines four types of case study design: single holistic design, single embedded design, multiple holistic design, and multiple embedded design. This research is a single-case design embedded in multiple units of analysis *(Yin, 2002)*. This single-case study examines five examples of the CEP's role in the development of a civic action plan at a variety of institutional types and geographic locations. A study that is embedded involves more than one unit of analysis. Yin *(1989)* states, "For example, even though a case study might be about a single public program, the analysis might include outcomes from individual projects within the program" *(p. 49)*. This case study describes the development of civic action plans and the knowledge, skills, abilities, and dispositions of CEPs in supporting and leading institution-wide strategic planning. The units of analysis are the CEPs located at multiple institutions.

Five CEPs each participated in an interview lasting between 45 and 90 minutes. The institutions represented by the participating CEPs included both public and private, associate's, baccalaureate, master's, and doctoral institutions, from the Northeast (2), Southwest (1), and Midwest (2) regions of the United States. Each participant was sent an e-mail from one of the three researchers asking them to participate in an interview to discuss their role as a CEP in the civic action plan and institution-wide strategic planning. The researchers communicated via Zoom software, recorded the interviews, and took notes for analysis. Prior to recruiting the participants, the researchers received Institutional Review Board approval for the project. The Results section describes each of the examples, outlining each CEP's career characteristics; the process for developing the civic action plan; the knowledge, skills, abilities, and dispositions utilized in the process; and how the CEP's participation in this process supported institution-wide strategic planning.

Results

Community Engagement Professional 1: Associate's College in the Southwest

The CEP at this institution has spent the 7 years of his career in the field of higher education community engagement and currently directs a center for service-learning at a community college in the Southwest United States. In that role, he has administrative oversight over the center and its collaborations with community relations and engaged learning. The center is located within the student affairs division and oversees student food insecurity initiatives, including food pantries and community gardens.

Process. At this institution, presidential leadership served as the catalyst for the civic action planning process. The president signed onto the statement early and then tasked two senior leaders within institutional effectiveness and the provost's office with conducting a process. These two leaders then convened a small group with broad campus representation that served as the core working group. In addition to existing key roles for community engagement, this team also included public relations staff and the faculty senate president. Over the year-long process, this group met once or twice a month to discuss work on the plan. In between meetings, members of the group convened various stakeholders for dialogues, individual meetings, and other modes of discussion. Existing councils were used as a vehicle, along with other means of reaching all relevant stakeholders.

The CEP served three distinct roles in the planning process. The first was securing and administering grant funds that supported an on-campus dialogue series to gather input for the plan. The second was serving as a champion for including community voice in the plan's development and in the plan's goals, including a specific goal of "exploring the impact" of the college's efforts on communities. Finally, the CEP took responsibility for writing pieces of the plan and engaging stakeholders.

The CEP described the main challenges of the plan process for himself personally and the process at large as working to deliberately create democratic processes to achieve "democratic outcomes." This meant setting aside existing ideas and agendas and remaining open, transparent, and inclusive. This was not always easy to achieve within an existing college structure that prioritized other modes of moving agendas forward. It also meant balancing

relationships with personal agendas to ensure the process led to stronger connections rather than creating factions.

Overall, the CEP saw the process of creating the plan as successful and worthwhile. He mentioned that it "got senior administrators talking about reciprocal community partnerships." He believes this will have long-term implications. He also attributed the team's success to the strength of existing relationships in the core working group that allowed disagreements to be discussed with respect and result in good outcomes. In addition, the plan has led to greater investment in community engagement infrastructure, including a new staff position in the center to handle coordination functions.

Although the plan was created as a part of a standalone process in response to the civic action statement commitments, it did align and integrate with the institution's existing mission and vision. It also integrated with an existing conversation about prioritizing high-impact practices and gave more depth to those conversations. Finally, the institution is now beginning a new overall strategic planning process that this plan will help to inform.

Competencies. In general, the CEP felt that nearly all the competency knowledge, skills, abilities, and dispositions in Dostilio et al.'s 2017 preliminary model were relevant to his role in the strategic planning process. One exception is that the college's plan does not, at this time, emphasize curricular engagement, so competencies in that area were less relevant to this process.

Of all the competencies outlined by Dostilio et al. *(2017)*, the following were most utilized by the CEP in the development of the plan:

- Able to communicate across boundaries and roles; between internal and external stakeholders
- Knowledge of democratic engagement and ability to enact a democratic engagement orientation (participatory processes, co-creation of knowledge, co-planning, inclusivity, etc.)
- Able to advocate for community engagement and communicate its value, vision, and goals in your context

Of the competencies listed, the most relevant was the ability to facilitate a truly democratic process that was not completely centered on the institution and kept community needs at the forefront.

The CEP was well equipped to lead that effort and felt a better plan was created because of his advocacy for those process elements. In addition, his deep understanding of community engagement research and best practices allowed him to build the understanding of others involved, particularly senior leaders.

Mentors were key to competency development for this CEP. He has cultivated relationships both locally and nationally across the field. Many of these were facilitated by conferences and other gatherings convened by organizations such as Campus Compact and the International Association for Research on Service Learning and Community Engagement (IARSLCE), including statewide events and graduate network programs.

Professional development opportunities were also vital, including opportunities to participate in national research conferences and attend national conferences and forums. Formal education also played a role, beginning with undergraduate education at an institution in the Midwest with a service-learning requirement that sparked initial interest, then a graduate program in community leadership. The CEP is now pursuing a Ph.D. in community engagement in higher education that continues to add to his knowledge, skills, and connections. Coworkers and prior work experience played a smaller role but contributed to a trusting work environment that allowed him to learn on the job in some situations.

Community Engagement Professional 2: Private Liberal Arts College in the Northeast

This CEP has more than 30 years of experience in a variety of related roles for an elite private institution in the Northeast. This included leading the creation of a Campus Compact affiliate in her state and serving for a time as the director of that organization in addition to her on-campus role.

Process. In many ways the CEP served as the catalyst for the process. She brought the civic action statement to the president and sought support. From there she formed the initial committee, which consisted of representatives from career services, faculty, curriculum, and institutional research. Among this group were two other individuals with a great deal of community engagement experience in other roles with outside organizations. This group decided together to place a greater emphasis on keeping the group small rather than including broad representation directly. Three of the working group members attended a Campus Compact training event on civic action plan creation.

The group spent much of the fall that year creating an inventory of existing efforts and gaps within the civic action statement framework and gathering information. The small group then sought other input through focus groups and other conversations with students, community members, faculty, and other staff. Specific outreach was made to include president's office staff, as well as faculty from a program on campus that has an existing community engagement requirement.

When the CEP convened the initial planning group, she had hoped to expand it at some point; however, based on past experiences, the group felt strongly that too large a size would hinder their progress. Although the group size worked in some ways, the CEP was also concerned that it contributed to a lack of representation from all relevant voices. It was also difficult at times to keep the group on track; furthermore, although the president was supportive in symbolic ways, senior leaders were not engaged in the process.

As mentioned above, the working group, although small, included several individuals with deep knowledge of community engagement, which was a significant asset. Group members were able to bring new ideas on cutting-edge practices to the table and were able to maintain "high energy, high commitment, and high investment." The group also included a faculty member with deep knowledge and strong commitment.

The CEP felt the process had one weakness: an inability to engage the campuses' communications staff in learning more or promoting the plan or process. That team continues to not see these efforts as "newsworthy or noteworthy," and even though the group has made progress gaining attention for individual stories, the larger context is not well understood or "covered." This contributed to a possible lack of buy-in from the larger campus community for the plan and its goals.

The conversations, however, have laid important groundwork that continues to have benefits today. Overall, the process expanded buy-in and understanding across campus, articulated very clear goals that involve the center and other partners on campus and beyond, and created strategic directions for the college that include the center.

This CEP has had the opportunity to oversee and participate in other strategic planning processes in her long tenure. These have included several opportunities to create center-specific plans and at least one opportunity to serve on an institution-wide planning

team. However, these two types of efforts have never been officially bridged until now. The civic action plan presented the first opportunity to create an institution-wide plan specific to community engagement. It preceded an institutional process that resulted in the education of students for citizenship being integrated into the larger institutional strategic plan and more connection between community engagement and newer initiatives around social innovation and experiential learning.

Competencies. The CEP had not reviewed the competency model before this conversation and found it very useful. She felt that nearly all the knowledge, skills, abilities, and dispositions were relevant to the strategic planning process. She also thought the model lacked an emphasis on cultural competence and humility and an understanding of international contexts that she thinks is critical. In addition, she saw much greater emphasis on the need to understand faculty roles and pressures than on understanding community roles and pressures and thinks they should be more equal.

Of all the competencies outlined by Dostilio et al. *(2017)*, the following were most utilized by the CEP in the development of the plan:

- Knowledge of democratic engagement and ability to enact a democratic engagement orientation (participatory processes, co-creation of knowledge, co-planning, inclusivity, etc.)
- Able to communicate across boundaries and roles; between internal and external stakeholders
- Embrace diversity among collaborators and promote inclusion
- Able to advocate for community engagement and communicate its value, vision, and goals in your context

The one area where the CEP does not feel equipped in a way that would have helped the process is in measuring impact.

Mentors have been key to the CEP's development, including some of the "early iconic figures of the movement." The CEP appreciated how open and accessible leaders in the higher education community engagement field have been to her and credited those relationships with much of her development and success. Perhaps because she does not have formal education beyond an under-

graduate degree, professional development convenings were key to these mentorship connections and much of her learning about the community engagement field. This included national conferences, statewide events, and other gatherings that allowed for both local connections to neighbors and national connections to peers. "I wouldn't be who I am or do what I'm doing and be able to think in the complexity I think without attending these and hearing and being inspired and feeling invited to contribute to the evolution of this field," she said.

The CEP's campus has also offered professional development and communities of practice that were vital. She also mentioned that being able to send staff to participate has meant they come back with new ideas, and she has benefited from that as well.

Community Engagement Professional 3: Public Master's Liberal Arts University in the Northeast

This CEP has been at her institution for nearly 20 years and, in 2009, started a center for community engagement and currently has a staff of one other full-time person, four who are part-time, and nearly 25 student workers.

Process. The catalyst for the plan was presidential leadership. As a result of the president sending out a campus message of commitment to civic action planning, the CEP felt legitimacy for the development of the plan, and also pressure to ensure it was thoroughly completed. The CEP formed a steering committee consisting of faculty members from across campus with the goal of developing their civic action plan. She did the writing and would then share drafts of the plan for feedback to the steering committee, which met every 2 months. Other than the steering committee, a dean from one of the colleges was also committed to the effort. The dean's support was essential and encouraged others to participate. The plan focused on faculty and faculty efforts, so having faculty buy-in was important.

The development of the plan was launched with a conference to allow faculty to showcase their work related to civic action. It was a great platform for faculty to share what they were doing, "a gateway for faculty to be proud of what they've done" and their work. In addition, attendees were able to get ideas from each other. The invited speakers focused on how this work can be integrated into promotion and tenure. This conference will become an annual event and remains one of the main elements of the plan. Another helpful element was that three of the steering committee members

attended a training that gave ideas for making the plan your own while avoiding prescribing what should be in the plan.

One of the greatest challenges of developing the plan was "getting people to take it seriously" and even getting faculty to think about community engagement and civic action. When people attended meetings, they would be engaged and contribute to the conversation, but there was little to no follow-through except for those on the steering committee. There was an attempt to form subcommittees, but that was not successful. The work was not the responsibility of the faculty and therefore not something that seemed important to the faculty. Faculty were not opposed to the development of the plan but were not always willing to act or get involved beyond attending meetings.

One of the major factors that contributed to the success of the plan was having two faculty members discuss the plan with their colleagues. These two faculty members were very engaged and committed to the process. The CEP felt that if she had done this on her own or tried to get buy-in without these two faculty members leading that effort, it would not have gone anywhere. Also, having the dean's support was extremely helpful and lent credibility to the process. It was also helpful to meet with the provost and the president. They communicated their support and were thoughtful about the process, including making constructive suggestions.

The civic action plan fit with the strategic plan and the mission of the university. The center had not been significant within the university, and now this work has become a strong element of what the university represents. The president is interested in graduates' ability to get a job, with critical thinking, communication, and problem solving central to that focus. Although this goal created alignment, the CEP still believes that "the plan is not going to go anywhere unless I push it." This comment was followed by an example of the planned development of a civic engagement minor. This effort needs to be led and supported by faculty, and if not encouraged by the CEP it is unlikely to happen.

Competencies. The competencies discussed focused on those that surfaced during the development of the plan. This plan focused on faculty; therefore, there was not much discussion about students or programs for students. The three areas most referenced by the CEP included leading change within higher education, institutionalizing community engagement on a campus, and facilitating faculty development and support. There were not many items selected in the other three areas.

Of all the competencies outlined by Dostilio et al. *(2017)*, the following were most utilized by the CEP in the development of the plan:

- Able to articulate connection between institutional mission and community engagement
- Able to advocate for community engagement and communicate its value, vision, and goals in your context
- Embrace the tension between charity and social change
- Embrace passion for and commitment to community engagement

The CEP discussed the challenge of not being a faculty member, commenting that since she was not in academic affairs, faculty "don't care about what I know about pedagogies." Although the CEP believed she had more knowledge than she was given credit for, this was an area where she wanted to find ways to build skills and knowledge about pedagogy.

The CEP stated that she attributed much of her success and skill base in her profession to having a mentor. In addition, attending many workshops and conferences over the years contributed to the development of her competencies, as well as taking on leadership roles such as chairing different groups in professional associations. Because she was the first professional staff person in community engagement at her institution and no one else on campus does this work, professional development opportunities and relationships that contributed to her development were external to her close, institutional network.

Community Engagement Professional 4: Private Doctoral University in the Midwest

This CEP has 13 years of experience in the profession. She started as a national service member and served as a community engagement coordinator at another institution before becoming the assistant director and then being promoted to director at her current institution.

Process. The CEP was the leader of her campus's civic action plan. There was considerable collaboration with a community relations manager out of the advancement office as well as the provost (the CEP is housed in Academic Affairs). There was a committee for the development of the plan; however, a three-person executive

committee did most of the work. In addition, a community engagement council was also involved in the process.

Central to the process was a self-assessment that was conducted before developing the plan. One of Campus Compact's regional offices developed a self-assessment measurement tool and process, which this institution chose to participate in. Those on the community engagement council took a survey based on this measurement tool, they assessed the data, and that information was used to inform the development of the plan.

Concurrent to the planning process launch, the president of the university announced an assessment and evaluation system that would be used in planning, assessment, and decision making for the university. At first, this presented a challenge for those developing the plan, as the president did not want more than one plan in place. However, through conversation the president agreed to the effort, and the plan was embedded into this continuous improvement plan and evaluation framework. Creating a link between these two efforts served as a catalyst for the civic action planning process.

The greatest challenge to this process was overlap in mission between advancement and the community-engaged learning office. The administration embraced the anchor institution model; however, it was not broadly understood that service-learning, community engagement, and the work of the community-engaged learning office fit into that model and thus, at times, "leadership didn't understand it as one mission, and therefore there were two efforts structurally." For the CEP, this often felt like "pushing a boulder up a hill." This situation created tension and the CEP felt isolated and unsupported in her vision. In addition, due to different reporting lines, some efforts were more of a competition than collaboration.

Transparency was ultimately the key to the success of the planning process. Knowing that broad support was needed to develop and implement the plan, the CEP went to the faculty senate and worked closely with the president's staff. In addition, being a good decision-maker helped in this process. People were looking for direction, and this CEP learned to provide leadership to this effort, tell people what action was needed, and respond accordingly if there was disagreement. Finally, taking the time to make the plan "look pretty" was important. This CEP knew that no one else would take on this task and make it a priority, so she took this on herself. The plan was embedded into the strategic plan of the university. Every element of the plan will be measured using the

overall institutional assessment process, which will be critical to long-term success.

Competencies. The CEP listed almost all the knowledge, competencies, skills, abilities, and dispositions as elements that were used in the development of the plan. The area with the most items identified was leading change within higher education. The category from which the least number of items was discussed was facilitating students' civic learning and development. In the other five categories, most of the items were mentioned as being used in the planning process.

Of all the competencies outlined by Dostilio et al. *(2017)*, the following were most utilized by the CEP in the development of the plan:

- Able to articulate connection between institutional mission and community engagement
- Able to cultivate and maintain relationships
- Embrace the tension between charity and social change
- Able to collaborate and work across role and disciplinary silos

The CEP noted that there was not a lack of competency, but issues related to power and the struggles within the university created challenges and a lot of tension. In addition, understanding faculty, their roles, and their reward structure was important. Evaluation and assessment are also essential to the success of this plan and an area for growth with this CEP. The strengths of this CEP included relationship- and coalition-building and inspiring a shared vision. She commented, "I see now that I'm leading culture change."

The CEP named two factors that significantly contributed to the development of her competencies. First, having mentors was essential to success. Although many mentors were mentioned, there was specific reference to the importance of having female mentors and former supervisors who invested in her. In addition, Campus Compact network sessions were valuable and a place where the CEP could be vulnerable, ask questions, and feel supported. Finally, she is currently enrolled in a Ph.D. program, and classes in that program are developing her skills and abilities and making her a better mentor for others.

Community Engagement Professional 5: Public Research University in the Midwest

This CEP has spent the last 28 years of his career in the field and has served the last 10 years in a senior leadership role at a public research university in the Midwest. In this role he oversees and directs a center dedicated to the university's mission and vision for public engagement. The center collaborates with administrators, faculty, staff, students, and community partners in all areas of community engagement.

Process. For this institution the civic action plan came at a time to recalibrate. When the president signed the statement, the institution was at the end of a 10-year plan for public engagement. At the same time, an institution-wide strategic plan was being implemented. Under the direction of the systemwide public engagement council, the CEP convened a group of 38 people to participate in the planning process. Of this group, 20 were faculty, 16 were directors of centers or other support staff, and two were students. The group met monthly and was very engaged. They divided into subgroups based on the plan, and during meetings there was a lot of sharing across these groups. Once the group had a draft, they hosted sessions to gather feedback from constituents and then prepared a final draft. The CEP in this case served as the intermediary between the Council on Public Engagement and the planning group, along with finalizing the plan and bringing it forward to engage stakeholders.

The CEP described the main challenge as navigating the infrastructure and culture of the institution internally. The planning group sought to include various constituents and be sensitive to institutional politics while keeping the process moving forward. The CEP acknowledged that tension occurred over whether to have community members on the action planning group. The group wanted to include their voices but were also cognizant that a lot of the issues were internally focused. Additionally, because they work with multiple communities, they were unsure what communities should be represented and who would be able to speak for them. Community members did question this aspect of the planning process.

The CEP chose to lead the planning process through a scaffolding approach by bringing in a set of structures to look at rather than starting from scratch. For example, the CEP brought the institution's application for Carnegie Classification in Community Engagement and the feedback they were given. This data provided

the working groups with information from which to build their plan. The monthly meetings were work sessions, and at each one the groups were expected to complete specific tasks that the CEP directed. This ensured meetings felt productive to the planning team.

In development of the plan, the institution's mission was kept at the center, with community engagement a demonstrated way to achieve the overall goals of the institution "as a strategy to tackle challenges and enhance the educational experience." Sending this message was an important outcome of the planning process.

Competencies. The CEP felt that he was competent in all the areas but could use additional work in one—cultivating high quality partnerships—because of the challenges with including community partners in the planning process. The CEP also noted that his scholarly experience offered a wider range of context and experience than was available to most CEPs.

Of all the competencies outlined by Dostilio et al. *(2017)*, the following were most utilized by the CEP in the development of the plan:

- Able to strategically plan
- Embrace innovation
- Able to work within the structural constraints of the institution toward social change

Within the list of competencies, the CEP felt equipped in most areas, at least at a basic level. This CEP has strong experience in strategic planning, engaging faculty, and institutionalizing community engagement. The area he saw as weakest was facilitating students' civic learning and development. He has the skills to show faculty how to do this, but he felt a need for support when it came to developing relationships and directly being involved in their learning as a facilitator because he is removed from working with students in this capacity.

The CEP identified coworkers as key to his professional development. He continues to make it a priority to surround himself with people who are passionate for the work. The CEP made it clear that he likes to develop others while being pushed by others. He looks for coworkers who have an authentic commitment, an eagerness to grow and learn, and who are visionary people who do things differently for institutional change and transformative

change. They look at communities differently, which helps this CEP as well.

Discussion and Analysis

In analyzing the findings of this study, researchers sought to explore the CEPs' role in the process and the competencies identified from Dostilio et al.'s *(2017)* model and how they were developed.

Process

Likely due to the source of the strategic plans studied, presidential leadership was a critical catalyst to each case study's planning process. This did not, however, necessarily translate to strong support or involvement in the planning process from leadership. In most cases, the CEP found a way to leverage the process in a way that was helpful to their efforts and had strong linkages to the university's strategic plans or other related planning processes. In this sense, the CEPs themselves were also strong catalysts for carrying the planning process forward and ensuring success.

In each case, the CEP did not write the plan alone. They sought to engage a group of stakeholders. The size and makeup of this group varied and was not always determined by the CEP. These groups required leadership and organization. In some cases, the CEP provided the leadership, and, in some cases, the CEP strategically relied on others whose positions on campus made them more able to influence decision-making. In all cases, the CEP played a strong role in trying to strike the right balance between keeping the process moving forward and effectively engaging stakeholders from campus and the community. Several of the CEPs specifically mentioned the thought process they used in selecting these stakeholders. This included ensuring that those who would be needed for implementation were engaged and served to provide background information and education on community engagement to a broader group.

Whether CEPs engaged stakeholders such as students and community partners depended on the individual context, but, at least in the case of community partners, this seemed to be something the CEPs thoughtfully considered. Only one specifically mentioned including students, but two talked at some length about their efforts to make sure community voices were heard and in one case believed that they did not do enough in this area. This attention to community partner voice may be a key leadership role that CEPs can play based on their unique perspectives and experiences.

The most common challenge cited in the planning process was navigating institutional "politics" and culture. This meant successfully integrating with other efforts and making the case for community engagement as a key factor in achieving institutional goals. It also meant working to keep the planning process in front of people and serving, in some cases, as the main driver for that process.

Competencies

For most of the CEPs the competency model was at least somewhat familiar to them, even if they had not fully read it prior to the interview. Most also believed that many of the competencies were relevant to the strategic planning process and struggled to narrow the list of those most essential to just a few. This demonstrates that efforts like institution-wide strategic planning force CEPs to draw upon nearly all the skills, knowledge, abilities, and dispositions they have built in a variety of ways for success.

As Table 1 demonstrates, however, a few specific areas and competencies stood out when CEPs were asked to choose the top three or four that were most relevant to the planning process.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the area leading change within higher education had the most referenced competencies. This area focuses on the ability to work with others to create change on campus and even specifically references the ability to strategically plan. Tied for second in the areas most mentioned were institutionalizing community engagement on a campus and cultivating high quality partnerships. Again, these seem to naturally align with an institution-wide strategic planning process. In most cases, the CEP sought to create structures to support institutionalization through the planning process, with one specifically mentioning the goal of creating a civic engagement minor on campus. As for high quality partnerships, this came up frequently. CEPs were thinking about how to include community partner voices and ensure that the process had a strong community impact.

The area least selected by the CEPs was facilitating faculty development and support. This is interesting, because working with faculty and working to institutionalize community engagement in academic affairs was mentioned in several of the case studies. The CEPs were focused on gaining faculty support and engaging faculty as champions for the plan, but perhaps did not need to draw upon their competencies for directly supporting faculty. In addition, it is noted that the CEPs did not hold faculty lines. Although some held terminal degrees, their position in the university was not classified

Table 1. Competencies Most Used by CEPs in Strategic Plan Development

Competency Area	Competency Type	Competency	Times Selected	Total
Leading change within higher education	Knowledge	Knowledge of democratic engagement and ability to enact a democratic engagement orientation	2	
		Knowledge of one's own personal agency as a change maker	2	
	Skill/ability	Able to articulate connection between institutional mission and community engagement	2	
		Able to strategically plan	2	
	Disposition	Embrace innovation	1	
		Embrace diversity among collaborators and promote inclusion	1	
	Critical Comments	Able to challenge problematic language use	1	11
Institutionalizing community engagement on a campus	Skill/ability	**Able to advocate for community engagement and communicate its value, vision, and goals in your context**	**3**	
		Able to leverage resources and advocate for community engagement as an institutional funding priority	1	
		Able to navigate the institution's political environment	1	
	Critical commitments	Able to work within the structural constraints of the institution toward social change	2	7
Facilitating students' civic learning and development	Knowledge	Knowledge of civic learning pedagogies	1	
		Knowledge of the ways in which students' identities inform and frame their community engagement experience, particularly those students from historically marginalized groups	1	
	Skill/ability	Able to collaborate with and support historically marginalized students	1	3

Table 1. Competencies Most Used by CEPs in Strategic Plan Development *continued*

Competency Area	Competency Type	Competency	Times Selected	Total
Facilitating faculty development and support	Skill/ability	Able to customize developmental training and support to fit each faculty member's needs and interests	1	1
Cultivating high quality partnerships	Knowledge	Knowledge of local community: history, strengths, assets, agendas, goals	1	
	Skill/ability	**Able to communicate across boundaries and roles; between internal and external stakeholders**	3	
		Able to connect campus and community assets	2	
	Disposition	Embrace passion for and commitment to community engagement	1	7

as faculty, which may account for the struggle of engaging faculty. The area facilitating students' civic learning and development was also mentioned less frequently. This may be explained by the focus of the study on strategic planning and not on the activities typically facilitated by CEPs. Although CEPs discussed student involvement in the planning process, students' learning and development was not an area central to this study.

The two most frequently mentioned competency areas were the ability to advocate for community engagement and communicate its value, vision, and goals in your context and the ability to communicate across boundaries and roles; between internal and external stakeholders. Both abilities relate to engaging and communicating with others, which is the core theme from these case studies. These two competencies are central to strategic planning and creating institutional change. Rather than being focused on creating the perfect strategic plan *product*, all the CEPs focused on the strategic planning process. They saw the process as a path to ensure future success, not necessarily because new goals would be written down, but because new people would be more engaged and informed and would understand the connection between community engagement and the institution's mission.

All the CEPs cited mentorship as the way that they had built and continue to develop their competencies. In some cases this meant peers and coworkers; in some cases, CEPs named their supervisors, and in others the inspiring leaders of the field. More than one mentioned the isolation of their role and the value they find in connecting with others with similar goals. One CEP discussed that when among colleagues with similar roles they can be vulnerable and learn, whereas in most cases they must be the expert and guarded. Most CEPs also mentioned professional development workshops and conferences, but, here again, this seemed to be mainly a way of connecting to colleagues and mentors, rather than critical to formal learning.

Some CEPs mentioned formal education both as a way to build competencies and as a means to gain the respect and trust of others across campus. One of the CEPs already has a Ph.D., and two others are in the process of getting them. In each of those cases, they referenced their graduate work and scholarship as key to the development of the competencies used in this process.

Conclusion

This case study provides a critical window into the staffing and leadership required to lead a successful institution-wide strategic planning process for higher education community engagement. In all but one example, the CEP had not engaged in any prior process that was focused on community engagement institution-wide. This demonstrates that the civic action statement and this process of its development served as an important catalyst for campuses to embrace civic action and community engagement and embed this activity into the strategic plan of the institution. It provided a critical platform for CEPs to use; it enabled them to build their skills in this area and allowed them to invite others into the process and create buy-in opportunities for a broad group of stakeholders.

The findings suggest that it is critical for CEPs to develop their ability to manage processes rather than gain specific knowledge. Nearly all of those interviewed focused on the various ways in which they engaged others, navigated institutional politics, and kept the process moving forward as key to their success. All the CEPs discussed mentorship as an important element in building these skills. Mentorship may be important because this information is best delivered through close relationships or because there are few formal professional development opportunities offered in the area of community engagement. Recognizing the importance of mentorship is vital for those seeking to support CEPs and further institutionalize community engagement in higher education. Increasing access to formal peer sharing networks and mentoring programs could be key for future success. In addition, workshops and publications could be offered that specifically discuss how to navigate structures and shape culture. The findings also suggest that although presidential leadership can be a key planning catalyst, staff organization and leadership ensure the process is successful and inclusive.

There are several possibilities for future research in this area. This study was conducted with a limited sample using a case study methodology. A different methodology that leverages a larger group of CEPs could give more concrete findings on the use of competencies. In addition, although the CEPs felt that their planning process was successful, we know little about how these processes were viewed by other stakeholders, including the leadership of higher education institutions. Given that presidents were a strong catalyst for these planning processes, it is important to continue to find ways to understand and support their role as well.

As this study focused on the development of the plan, further study should closely consider how these plans are implemented. At least some of the CEPs expressed concern about their ability to continue the momentum generated by the plan and achieve its outcomes. This implementation phase will require a different set of competencies, and given that the implementation of the plan directly impacts the outcomes of this work, research in plan implementation is suggested. Finally, mentorship was key to the development of the skills and abilities that supported the CEPs in leading this process; however, the conditions that created those mentoring relationships are not well understood. Some CEPs referenced specific organizations and programs, but many did not specify what allowed them to form their mentoring relationships. Without understanding the context of these relationships, it will be difficult to ensure that this type of relationship-building continues to flourish within the higher education community engagement field and among CEPs.

Strategic direction and goal-setting is critical to success and could be a substantial method for further institutionalizing and sustaining higher education community engagement. Finding ways to effectively instigate and support planning efforts is critical, as is building the skills of leaders to take on those roles. From this limited study it is clear that in at least some cases, CEPs are called upon to take on that leadership role, and it's important to consider how to prepare them and their institutions for success.

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About the Authors

Ashley Farmer-Hanson is the director of civic engagement and the assistant dean for student life at Buena Vista University. Her research interests focus on community engagement, social justice, and diversity. She earned her Ed.D. in education administration: higher education from the University of South Dakota.

Julianne Gassman is the director of community engagement at the University of Northern Iowa, an associate professor in the Department of Health, Recreation and Community Services, and the campus executive director of the Nonprofit Leadership Alliance. Her research interests include service-learning, com-

munity engagement, nonprofit management, and student debt. She received her Ph.D. in higher education from the University of Iowa.

Emily Shields is the executive director of Iowa Campus Compact and the acting executive director of Minnesota Campus Compact since 2018. Her research interets are in politics, public policy, civic engagement, and higher education community engagement. She earned her M.A. in philanthropy and nonprofit development from the University of Northern Iowa.

PROJECTS WITH PROMISE

Community Engagement Professionals at Play: Collaborative Assessment as Culture Change

Sylvia Gale, Terry Dolson, and Amy L. Howard

Abstract

This article describes the data lab, an assessment method that could, the authors argue, help community engagement professionals (CEPs) align their assessment efforts with commitments and capacities named in the community engagement professionals competency model, contributing to democratic engagement and helping to resist neoliberal pressures in higher education. The data lab method employs a playful approach to making sense of data, utilizing extended and applied metaphors and involving all stakeholders in community-engaged work in collaborative meaning-making. Through the ongoing and iterative practice of data labs, stakeholders are invited to better understand and make changes to their collective work in implementing more democratic practices in the institution. *Keywords:* assessment, democratic engagement, culture change, Community Engagement Professionals (CEPs), data lab

Introduction

*I*n her review of literature about the community engagement professional (CEP) competency model and program administration and evaluation, Farmer-Hanson *(2017)* notes that although "[k]nowing how to measure community engagement efforts, how to involve others in that measurement, and how to leverage the results is vital for CEPS," it is also clearly "an area of struggle" *(p. 89)*. Our experiences developing and implementing assessment of community engagement at varying scales at a center for civic engagement at a small liberal arts university have taught us that the question of how to involve others in our assessment work is central to addressing this struggle. If we effectively involve others in and across the various stages of assessment (planning, design, implementation, analysis, and dissemination), we are better positioned to measure what we care about and to use these results to inform action. In this article, we will explore the *data lab*, a method we have developed and used with colleagues at our university over the past 7 years in order to make meaning of data together, primarily in the data analysis portion of our assessment cycle. As part of a larger assessment ecosystem, we have found data labs especially beneficial in that they help to catalyze an inclusive, collaborative, and ongoing practice of meaning-making.

The data lab method is in keeping with the CEP competency model in that it encourages CEPs to engage with assessment in a way that amplifies what the model names as one of our key "critical commitments," namely, "developing critical consciousness through meaningful praxis" *(Dostilio et al., 2016, p. 46)*. We have also found that the lab can support CEPs in their role as "change-oriented leaders" who "[use] their positions within the middle spaces of their organizations to catalyze change and greater realization of postsecondary education's civic purpose" *(Dostilio & Perry, 2017, p. 2)*. Specifically, data labs build a collaborative culture of inquiry through an inclusive, invitational, and cocreative approach. No matter what its focus, the invitation of the lab is to make meaning together, rather than to digest meaning that has been made. This kind of meaning-making is, we argue here, a democratic practice, and a powerful if simple way that CEPs can support cultural change on their campus and in their communities. Ultimately, the data lab method can help CEPs to be mindful of assessment as not only a discrete skill or knowledge base important to administering community engagement programs or to institutionalizing community engagement, but as a larger disposition, one that embraces ongoing learning and collective reflection, in the service of strategizing toward institutional and social change.

As we have experimented with and refined the data lab method, we have been inspired by the work of Imagining America's Assessing the Practices of Public Scholarship (APPS) research team, which recently urged the field to look carefully "at the role SLCE [service learning and community engagement] values play in SLCE assessment practices" *(Bandy et al., 2016, p. 96)*. Like Bandy et al., we have found that it is most effective to engage assessment from within a democratic engagement orientation, as this framework emphasizes cocreation and shared inquiry among all partners in community engagement. Building from Saltmarsh, Hartley, and Clayton's *(2009)* seminal piece on democratic civic engagement, Bandy et al. *(2018)* call for our field to better instantiate the values of democratic engagement in our assessment work, taking into account, specifically, the ways a democratic engagement orientation "draws on the knowledge, expertise, experience, and perspectives of everyone involved in any particular partnership—community members, students, faculty, staff—and insists that all have a voice" *(p. 18)*. We still have room to grow as we experiment with ways to use the data lab method with a full range of stakeholders and across all phases of assessment. Yet our own experiences consistently using and learning from data labs with colleagues on and off campus

have led us to believe that it is a promising method for enacting the premise of democratic engagement. In this way, the data lab is one example of a tool that can help CEPs approach assessment as what APPS calls a "democratic practice," one that helps us to "nudge the world toward such ultimate outcomes as democracy, equity, and justice" *(Bandy et al., 2018, p. 63)*.

In this article we will situate the data lab as a proactive response to neoliberal pressures in higher education and as a method that amplifies collaboration, continuous improvement, and play—achieved through the use of metaphors. The data lab has also contributed to cultural change at our institution, as it has helped us to more deeply and intentionally embed democratic practices into our assessment work. We will then describe and analyze the impact of the data lab method, outlining how we have used it and what it has yielded for our center. Finally, we will examine challenges and opportunities posed by the data lab method and consider next steps for how the method might be shared, assessed, and improved in collaboration with other stakeholders and CEPs across the country.

Assessing Community Engagement Under Neoliberal Pressures

Much has been written about the ways that neoliberalism, as an ideology that "reduces the purpose of public institutions to their role within the market" *(Orphan & O'Meara, 2016, p. 215)*, affects and is reflected in higher education, casting students as consumers and faculty as purveyors of a marketable good or "academic entrepreneurs" *(Orphan, 2018, p. 63; see also Brown, 2003, and Giroux, 2002)*. But neoliberalism places a particular weight on CEPs, especially when it comes to assessment. On one hand, as Orphan and O'Meara *(2016)* and Saltmarsh and Hartley *(2016)* have described, the community engagement movement is in itself part of a response to and a defense against the effects of neoliberalism, in that it pushes back against the assertion of private and market-based gains over public goods *(Orphan & O'Meara, 2016, p. 218)*. On the other hand, community-engaged initiatives, which are often isolated within the institution (at the level of a center or program, or seen as the purview of a handful of departments), can and most often do take shape as "surface-level boutique operations" that "co-exist with neoliberal ideologies and effort without much conflict" *(Orphan & O'Meara, 2016, p. 219)*. For CEPs operating in resistance to, but at the margins of, the neoliberal university, assessment is a necessary and often urgent activity designed to satisfy the institution's demands

for information that will justify and maintain the existence of community engagement.

This is a job CEPs must take seriously, as is suggested by the competency model's articulation of the "ability to report data to strengthen institutional support" as a primary skill *(Dostilio et al., 2016, p. 48)*. However, it is also work that can easily in itself consume all assessment activity, energy, and enthusiasm. Consider, for example, the insistent requests CEPs receive for the enumeration of community service hours or dollars. Such indicators speak to the quantity of engagement but not, in themselves, to its quality. If ideally we measure what we value, in practice and in the absence of unlimited time and resources, we too often value what we are expected to measure. As Muller *(2018)* observes, "what can be measured is not always worth measuring; what gets measured may have no relationship to what we really want to know" *(p. 3)*. One obvious danger of this assessment trap is that in primarily reacting to institutional demands (which are often themselves brought on by external pressures on institutions), we miss the critical insights into our programs that might come from following "what we really want to know." This is a peril even when we are measuring things we value a great deal, as we were reminded recently at a CEP gathering convened by a state council of higher education. The council had just introduced a new policy on assessing the quality of civic engagement as a core competency. During a question and answer period, the director of a center at one of the state's public universities asked a clarifying question: "Is the focus of this policy solely on student learning or are we also interested in community impact?" The council representative's answer was immediate: "Your focus should be on students and your campus. I would be concerned if your narrative focused on community impact versus what your students are getting."

The council representative's response was unsurprising; an exclusive focus on student learning is easily justified in our institutions as "mission critical." Yet the scenario points to the dilemma faced by CEPs charged with assessing community engagement. The CEP's role is, in part and as the CEP model affirms, to lead change in higher education. Central to this role is an orientation around democratic engagement, which, as Saltmarsh et al. *(2009)* assert, hinges on an understanding of knowledge construction itself as collaborative across community and university stakeholders *(p. 9)*. The CEP competency model names this as the "ability to encourage a democratic engagement orientation," which it elaborates as knowledge of "participatory processes, co-creation of knowledge,

co-planning, inclusivity, etc." *(Dostilio et al., 2016, p. 46)*. When it comes to assessment, however, trying to enact this orientation results in tension because the reflexes of our institutions send us down narrow pathways that reinforce divided thinking (like students versus community) and lead us away from, not toward, the collaborative impulses and imperatives at the heart of our field.

The current emphasis on assessment in higher education in the United States, economic historian Jerry Muller *(2018)* argues, is one outcome of a "seemingly irresistible pressure to measure performance, to publicize it, and to reward it" *(p. 4)*, an obsession that is fueled, specifically, by the requests of accrediting bodies for "ever more elaborate measures of performance" *(p. 75)*. We have not found a way to function as CEPs outside this paradigm; indeed, at this point there may be no outside. However, embracing a creative and inclusive method for assessment, which we call a data lab, has illuminated for us the possibilities for aligning our assessment practices with a democratic engagement orientation and has opened up rather than constrained our thinking about the impact of our community-engaged work.

Metaphor: A Figure of Thought

During a data lab, stakeholders in a program, class, or shared experience gather to look carefully at artifacts (data) that emerge from their collaborations. The only requirements for participating in a lab are curiosity, openness to exploring and interpreting data in new ways, and a willingness to reflect collectively to gain new understandings. The artifacts we have examined in labs to date (field journals, reflection papers, blog posts, survey results, syllabi, community organization newsletters and participant surveys, mission statements, learning goals, etc.) originated in classes our center supports, programs we administer, and community partner relationships we help to steward.

The data lab method, however, employs a key component not often found in data analysis: "metaphorical concepts" *(Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 5)*. CEPs create the data lab following certain steps that center questions and metaphors:

1. Find a collaborator to help you create the data lab. This will be more fun with an open-minded and curious partner who shares your love of learning.

2. Identify the question you want to explore, and then locate the data you have that might speak to that question. Or,

identify the data you want to process (charts, graphs, student assignments, syllabi, partner reports, etc.) and articulate a linking question you will ask across this data.

3. Consider what kind of thinking you are interested in doing about this data, and generate a metaphor that will be useful to structure that thinking. Try out several: You'll know you've hit on a good one when the metaphor begins to suggest ways of thinking about the data you've identified for analysis.

4. Decide how to group the data, and divide it into three to five different data stations. For each data station, come up with an exercise that will invite participants to explore the data using the metaphor.

5. Write detailed instructions for each station and make worksheets that the participants can use to perform the activity described in the instructions.

6. Set up the stations around the room. Provide several sets of instructions that will stay at the station and enough worksheets for all participants, as well as any other supplies necessary to complete the activity (pencils, rulers, etc.) and any props that will make the metaphor come to life.

7. Gather all participants, give them an overview of the purpose and focus of the data lab, and explain the metaphor you will be using. Advise them of any specific instructions, such as how many stations they should visit in the allotted time.

8. Allow participants to circulate and choose their own sequence of stations. Not every participant will complete every station, and that is OK.

9. Gather in a circle or around a table and conduct a group discussion. Ask questions about what participants learned, as well as what they wish they had learned. For example: What did you notice? What surprised you? What did you learn about *X*? Having seen what you've seen, what else do you wish you knew?

10. Take good notes of the discussion to document learning and to fuel future inquiries and next steps.

11. Collect all of the worksheets for future analysis by the assessment team.

The selection and development of a metaphorical concept is at the heart of the data lab methodology; it is what makes the experience playful. For each data lab, the planners choose a metaphorical concept to build the lab around (metaphors we have used to date include an amusement park, coffee brewing, alpine sports, archaeology, house design, and magic). The Greek origin of the word *metaphor* ("to carry" [*phor*] "across" [*meta*]) points to the effort and transformation inherent in linking one thing to another through language, and the concept dates back to Aristotle. More recent thinkers have considered that a metaphor is not just a "figure of speech" but rather a "figure of thought" *(Hickey, 1999, p. 3)*. As Lakoff and Johnson *(1980)* argue, metaphors are not just fodder for poets: "We have found, on the contrary, that metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action" *(p. 3)*. They explain: "The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" *(p. 5)*. In this vein, data lab planners choose a metaphor by asking: What kind of thinking will help us make meaning of this data? How could setting the data in this specific and different context be fruitful? Planners don't know what the outcome of extending the metaphor will be. Each station's activities invite the participants to continue extending and applying the metaphor, exercising their own interpretative skills and imagination. For any given lab, we might begin our planning by considering what data we want to review as a group. This data can be a mix of direct and indirect measures, and of qualitative and quantitative products. Or we might begin with a focused question, like "What are students learning about their own identity because of community-based learning?" Once we are clear on the focus of shared inquiry, the guiding metaphor we select for the lab is an invitation to map our data with a concept that has no obvious relationship, in an effort to generate new insights.

Participants cycle through each station, working alone or in groups to grapple with data in creative and unfamiliar ways as they apply and extend the metaphorical concept. We allow enough time for participants to move through most of the data stations (we have found that an hour of focused quiet time is usually about right for a lab with four to five stations). We then conclude each data lab by asking questions along the following two themes:

1. What are we learning about [focus of the data lab] from this data?
2. What else do we wish we knew?

The first line of questioning unifies our inquiry and prevents us from getting stuck in a critique of any specific program or initiative that produced that data lab's artifacts. The second line of questioning reveals important gaps in our data collection processes, and, most important, points us toward future directions for inquiry. This focus on "what's missing" has been particularly useful in helping us leverage the data lab process toward change on multiple levels, as we will describe below.

Although it is always tempting to allow data lab participants to encounter the artifacts under consideration in comfortable and familiar ways, we hold fast to applying metaphors. Metaphors help unsettle our own cognitive maps, whether we are aware of those maps or not. When a group of professors looks at a student's blog post, for example, their initial stance is as graders, judges of the work, comparing the writing they see with a mental map of the ideal version along a spectrum of poor to excellent. CEPs also carry a spectrum in their minds for moving a student from "not civically engaged" to "fully civically engaged." Applying metaphors to our data disrupts our cognitive maps by creating a shared challenge of translation and analysis. Grappling with the extension of a metaphor is hard work and can be uncomfortable. We do it because it helps to move us from binary ways of thinking ("good" or "bad") and into deeper knowledge of the objects and ideas at hand as we notice, wonder, describe, and discuss what we see.

For many participants, metaphor play is also fun, engaging imaginations that are not often invited into work settings, and leading in surprising directions. For example, in a recent lab conducted with faculty, we applied the metaphor of archaeology to student work produced in community-based learning classes. When planning the lab, we imagined lab participants as archaeologists, using archaeological tools to analyze student reflections. Data stations around the room contained objects like small shovels, and we built one station around a chart called a "stratigraphic," which archaeologists use to track the depth at which artifacts are discovered. At this station we examined a "core sample" of student blog posts created over the course of a semester. The station included the following instructions:

> Using the stratigraphic worksheet provided, consider each layer (post) of the core sample (blog) separately. What does learning look like in this layer? Write out a few important phrases you see. What kind of learning

is it? Can you represent it visually? e.g.: At this level the learning looks like a bowl because. . . .

The discussion that followed the lab was remarkably free of the complaints that commonly dominate faculty discussions of student writing on our campus. Instead, faculty focused on the quality of the reflective thinking, noticed the progression of insights, wondered about how the reflection prompts had been worded, and considered how they might change their own reflection assignments. The playfulness of the activities in the lab invited faculty to come out of their disciplinary silos and focus on the common ground of community-based learning. In doing so, participants found new, generative ways of thinking about the learning happening in their courses. Feedback after the data lab revealed the impact the activity had on the faculty's mind-set when several faculty commented that they were surprised at how much they enjoyed and learned from the session, claiming it even made them like assessment.

Play and Making Meaning

In our center, the data lab has become an eagerly anticipated ritual. We conduct one to two data labs each year with our staff, and other data labs as relevant with faculty and community partners. We have found that data labs help us to deepen our understanding of our work across our center, and in turn to develop and refine our programs using evidence. Although program evaluation and improvement are benefits of the lab, its fundamental goal is to build a culture of inquiry among our colleagues and collaborators, in part by opening dialogue about foundational concepts relevant to our work and engaging our team in an inclusive, generative, recurring, and playful assessment conversation. One of our team's favorite data labs used J. K. Rowling's magical world of Hogwarts as its metaphorical backdrop. The focus of this lab was on deepening our understanding of the ways students learn about social issues through civic engagement. We entered the lab with a brief lesson in the history of magic (a review of participation numbers for our center for the previous year), and then circulated among stations like the "Pensieve." *Harry Potter* readers might remember the great wizard Dumbledore saying:

I use the Pensieve. One simply siphons the excess thoughts from one's mind, pours them into the basin, and examines them at one's leisure. It becomes easier to

> spot patterns and links, you understand, when they are
> in this form. *(Rowling, 2000, p. 597)*

At this station, participants glimpsed the past via a sampling of essays from a community-based learning biochemistry class and were asked to "draw the moment that you see in the Pensieve (in the student essay), in which the student identifies the connection to biochemistry."

This exercise was useful in two ways. First, the metaphor of the Pensieve forced participants to slow down as they processed the data through an uncommon lens, imagining and drawing a student's "aha moment"—the moment in time at his or her service site wherein the student made a connection between their service and a biochemistry question (see Figure 1 for an example of a visual representation produced in the data lab). Second, the accumulation of these images (which we examined in gallery form at the end of the lab) allowed our colleagues, together, to connect and synthesize our examination of singular artifacts in a way that transformed our larger understanding. Creativity matters, we have found, because it freshens people's relationships with fundamental assessment questions, such as "What are our students learning?" The playfulness that characterizes a data lab moves CEP staff away from sensitivity about the success or shortcomings of their own programs and toward shared inquiry about the implications and consequences of our work.

The data lab process, while fun, can be unsettling within the normative framework of assessment culture in higher education. A new staff member once confided after a lab, "It was great and I learned a lot. But I don't understand—what is the answer?" The culture in which assessment means checking for right answers is entrenched, and it has robbed many of us of opportunities to learn about and from our own work. When we treat assessment as being primarily about finding out whether or not students learned what we wanted them to learn, we do not do justice to our students' meaning-making experiences, or to our own. When we delegate the work of assessment solely to experts on campus, we short-change the possibility of shared inquiry and collective meaning-making. By emphasizing the data lab as a cornerstone of our assessment cycle, we are not rejecting conventional assessment measures, like rubrics and surveys, which we also do employ. Rather, we are inserting those measures into an assessment ecosystem grounded in our own recurring and reflective practice. This ecosystem would be familiar to most CEPs. We complete annual evaluation plans

Figure 1. A center for civic engagement staff member's representation of the moment a student integrated community experience with classroom learning. "Pestered by the disconnect between regurgitating healthy tips to program participants on losing weight, but truly having a limited understanding of what processes occur, I discovered my bio-chemical connection to obesity."

and reports as required by our Office of Institutional Effectiveness, collect information from participants in our programs, and conduct periodic, institution-wide audits of community engagement in sync with accreditation cycles and other national benchmarking opportunities (like the Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement). But instead of focusing our energies primarily on collecting and submitting data for those reports, we leverage this work in combination with data labs to learn as much as we can about our impact. We find our team energized by the regular reflection and learning we do in our labs, together and with our constituents. We think that our mission is furthered more by this emphasis on collective reflective process than by focusing on completing assessment products.

Changing Culture

The data lab has become our primary method for feeding and sustaining a generative assessment culture because it centers the

real questions we—and not others—have about our work and its impact. Although our formal evaluation reports don't include the drawings and other items that data lab participants produce, the process of continually inquiring through this method has directly affected our evaluation tools. For example, in a recent lab, we examined end-of-year surveys in which students reflected on the skills they were learning through civic engagement. Our analysis led us to ask, among other questions, "How are students utilizing their skills to build the capacity of our nonprofit partners?" We have now modified a capacity-building survey, completed by students at the end of the year, in order to capture more nuanced answers to that question. Data labs have also led to numerous specific program refinements. For example, while examining field journals in the archaeology data lab, participants noticed how one instructor's responses to early journal entries, which praised certain kinds of observations and discouraged others, clearly led the students to make better observations later. Because of the dialogue around this, center staff subsequently began to use this journal entry commentary as an example to help other faculty to learn the value of formative feedback on reflection.

Overall, the data lab has affected our approach to assessment by

- shifting our culture from "my students" to "our students," helping us break out of program silos and ask bigger questions;
- helping us develop new and richer data streams;
- allowing us to claim assessment as an area of shared learning we undertake together, rather than a burden imposed from outside or as the responsibility of one person on our civic engagement staff; and
- opening up new, generative relationships with our institutional research colleagues, who have been excited by our staff's enthusiasm for ongoing assessment.

These changes have been positive. What we find most important, however, is that data labs spur more questions to fuel future data labs. This circularity is not a failure of the process, but a sign of its ongoing and iterative nature. Like inquiry itself, the success of a data lab lies in the extent to which it sparks more of what drives it in the first place—curiosity, an interest in learning, a commitment to ongoing learning from learning. What we find most significant as CEPs invested in long-term institutional and cultural change

are the ways the process has led us not to answers but to more and better questions. Consider, for example, the contrast between the questions we landed on in our inaugural data lab, held in May 2011, and the questions sparked by a data lab only 3 years later (see Table 1). At our first data lab, we examined as a staff the fruits of our assessment efforts at the time. This included student volunteer

Table 1. What Else Do We Wish We Knew?

Data Lab #1 (May 2011)	Data Lab #11 (June 2014)
How can we track students across programs and across years?	What motivates the large percentage of first generation and minority participants to participate in our programs?
What are students' own learning goals?	
	What are the demographics of students awarded Federal Work Study?
Are there connections between programs and partners (tracking relationships with partners)?	What are men doing? How can we understand the gender imbalance in our programs?
What are faculty's experience and reflections?	
	How can we understand the under-representation of the business school in our programs?
What are students' majors in our center's orbit?	
What is the connection between the experience and the class and how students make that connection?	What is the connection between how people were advised and what happened for them? Can we track students advised/ relationship to program participation?
What are the community-identified needs we are working on with partners?	What is the breakdown of students in our orbit by school and year?

and site supervisor surveys, community-based learning class evaluations, and information about participation in our events (range of topics, numbers of participants). Our first data lab question was simple and broad: What are we learning about our work? As we examined and discussed the artifacts, and especially as we considered what we did *not* know from this evidence but *wished* we could glimpse, our staff encountered the unsatisfying gap between the kind of information our assessment was providing and the questions we actually considered important. The evidence assembled suggested that we were most concerned about customer service. But this did not adequately reflect our real concerns about student and faculty learning, partner needs, and the accessibility and inclu-

siveness of our programs. Confronting this gap together quickly set us on a path to grow our data sources so that we might be able to ask and answer more nuanced questions. The list of questions we generated 3 years later (included in the table) reflects this shift.

In response to the discomforts surfaced in our first data lab, we developed more sophisticated ways of tracking students' participation in our center's programming, which allowed us to disaggregate student participation by demographic characteristics. We also began a years-long focus on student learning, which involved using the data lab method to iteratively develop student learning outcomes grounded in our own reflection on the evidence about what students were (and were not) learning. We now use data labs to, in part, explore what we are learning from our measurements of our student learning outcomes, which involves looking more closely at student artifacts (like reflection papers and written protocols). After several years of focusing intently on questions of student learning, we have recently begun shifting and expanding our data lab focal points to include questions about community partnerships, and we have begun including community partners in our labs.

Democratic engagement, as articulated by Saltmarsh et al. *(2009)*, "locates the university within an ecosystem of knowledge production" in which there is a "multi-directional flow of knowledge and expertise" *(p. 10)*. The outcomes generated through this exchange are a result of the "co-creation of knowledge," not the dissemination of the university's expertise *(Saltmarsh et al., 2009, p. 11)*. The data lab is one method by which assessment can facilitate that cocreation. It is a space, specifically, in which people can engage in authentic discussion, seeking meaning together. Such exchange is reminiscent of what Palmer *(2011)* has noted in Alexis de Tocqueville's observations of American civic life in the 1830s. Tocqueville named among the requirements for democracy what he called "habits of the heart," which Palmer *(2011)* summarizes as "deeply ingrained patterns of receiving, interpreting and responding to experiences that involve our intellect, emotions, self-images, and concepts of meaning and purpose" *(p. 24)*.

In a data lab, we exercise these "habits" by encouraging participants from different positions inside and outside higher education to bring their curiosity and full selves to the project of exploring the shared meaning that emerges when we examine and discuss data from our distinct and subjective points of view. We know from the outset that the meaning we make together will be contingent on who is in the room and what we come in knowing and having

experienced. We have also learned that it is useful to have people present who are familiar with the evidence we are considering, as they can act as checks on the impulse to too-easily generalize or come to abstract conclusions. The artifacts we consider will have different meaning to the faculty member who taught the course from which they emerged, colleagues who teach community-based learning classes in other disciplines, the community organization staff member who was on site with students, center staff close to and far away from the specific program in the spotlight, or students involved and students not directly involved. But the insights and questions we raise *together*—or rather, the togetherness of the inquiry—is what matters.

Because of its "togetherness," the data lab is also potentially disruptive of what Simpson *(2014)* has aptly called the "relentless attachment to privatization and the destruction of an ethical and relational framework" that is at the heart of neoliberal ideology *(p. 192)*. As a method, the data lab is inherently relational, necessarily social, and playful. It challenges the vertical and external flow of our data in favor of a peer-to-peer data network, a conversation aimed not at demonstrating (*Was it good?*) or diagnosing (*To what extent did they get it?*) but rather at grappling with the realities and complexities that come up when we spend time with the material artifacts that reflect the lived experiences of community-engaged practice. We propose the data lab as a method that resists the relentlessness of neoliberalism not to aggrandize the data lab method, but to emphasize the significance of the kind of culture change that is possible when we exercise the habits of democracy within our assessment practices. Such habits contribute to a guiding "civic ethos" as described by the National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement (*2012)* as "the infusion of democratic values into the customs and habits of everyday practices, structures and interactions" on our campuses *(p. 15)*. The data lab, as well as other assessment practices that enact a democratic engagement orientation, helps to cultivate a "defining character of the institution and those in it that emphasizes open-mindedness, civility, [and] the worth of each person" *(National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, 2012, p. 15)*.

Without the recurring structure and cycle of the data lab, the assessment we conduct at our own center would fit neatly into the neoliberal framework. We track, collect, analyze, and submit our reports up the data chain. These reports can then be useful fodder for private ends (awards and recognitions, promotional stories for the institution, annual reports, etc.). The data lab inter-

rupts the instrumental nature of this data cycle by providing an opportunity for participants not only to discover something new in an afternoon, but, more important, to engage in a conversation that significantly redirects the methods, means, and meanings of our assessment, our community engagement, and our institutions themselves.

The Way Forward

Looking ahead, the logical trajectory of the data lab for us is toward increased inclusion, both in terms of how we conduct our own data labs and how we share and track the value of the method for other CEPs. One next step for us is to continue expanding the spectrum of stakeholders we regularly include in the lab. For example, though we know colleagues at other schools who have done so, we have not yet invited students into our data labs. Our aim in doing so in future labs is to use the experience to collaboratively learn about the impacts of the community engagement experiences while also fostering student participants' "civic growth and development," a key CEP competency *(Dostilio et al., 2016, p. 48)*. As we extend the labs in this way, we must address some complications:

- Monitoring our own expectations around our stated student learning outcomes. How will the presence of students affect the way our staff and colleagues interact with and respond to the data?
- Building reflection and learning into the process beyond the data lab itself. How do we structure time before and after the lab with student participants to ensure intentional scaffolding of their learning and development?

Recognizing, as Farmer-Hanson *(2017)* states, that "community partner voice in the assessment process is key to ensure that both parties' needs are being met" *(p. 90)*, we also seek to further the data labs we conduct with community partners and to more systematically include community partners in labs, including those labs that don't specifically focus on the partnership. To date, we have conducted one data lab that specifically paired faculty members with their community partners, examining a variety of artifacts, from mission statements to student reflections, that relate to their specific partnership. We observed a high level of engagement among faculty and partners in these discussions, and we noted some surprise at how much they didn't know "the basics" about one

another's goals, projects, and institutions. This lab highlighted the value of creating space for faculty and partners to think together in a different way from the regular, transactional communications. They each shared the lens of their own sector and perspective, which helped the development of shared language and goals for their partnership.

Improving relationships and shared outcomes by using this method seems ideal, yet we have failed to systematically replicate the pairing of faculty and community partners in a data lab. Working across sectors is challenging for many reasons, not the least of which is that community partners feel pressured to shape their assessment efforts in a way that speaks to funders. Faculty are accustomed to looking at data with the tools of their own disciplines, different from one another and from those of community partners. Working across these lines requires skilled facilitation by CEPs, and time. Even when we have experienced the benefits of the data lab, which puts people in a creative and playful mind-set and invites shared discovery, it has been difficult to prioritize this activity in the face of what can feel like participants' more pressing obligations. Building joint community partner and faculty data labs into our annual cycle of partnership support and development is a key next step for us.

In this vein, we are also scrutinizing our past overreliance on our own center staff as the primary participants in data labs. It is all too easy to build data labs into our existing team time and to cut contextual corners as our group is now well versed in the method. By including more students, partners, and faculty in future data labs, we will deepen our continuous learning and improve the method itself. These efforts will also help us test how the model might work in varied contexts, for example, when a CEP may employ the data lab as a way to engage in creative assessment and to deepen connections and learning among community engagement allies on and off campus who do not share a primary work team.

Over the past few years, we have shared the data lab method with Association of American Colleges and Universities leadership and with CEPs from other campuses—public and private, large and small—via the Bonner Foundation network, the Imagining America consortium, and other conferences in the field. As a result, other CEPs have begun to use the data lab method as a way to involve myriad stakeholders in meaningful and substantive reflection on their shared community-engaged practice. For example, the Ursinus Center for Advocacy, Responsibility and Engagement at Ursinus College uses one to two data labs per year as a way

to evaluate its Bonner program, finding it a useful method for allowing unexpected outcomes to emerge. At Ursinus, data labs have included faculty, Bonner program and other college staff, institutional research professionals, nonprofit administrators, and student participants *(K. Turek, personal communication, December 12, 2018)*. The team at the Swearer Center for Public Service at Brown University has also adopted the data lab as part of their ongoing learning, inquiry, and continuous improvement. Most recently, the Swearer Center has worked to engage their team in ongoing artifact identification and collection, stewarded by their assessment staff, and to carve out relevant next steps for each of the center's units/programs. Their focus is on ensuring that the knowledge produced through the data lab feeds back into action planning and improved data collection *(G. Manok, personal communication, December 18, 2018)*. As the data lab method is used by other CEPs, an important next step for us will be, when possible, to understand the implications, challenges, and successes of the tool. What works? What doesn't? Why? How can the data lab be employed across the stages of assessment, and not only as a tool for data analysis? How might we learn and improve the data lab method from cross-institutional analysis?

The ongoing experimentation with the data lab method suggests that assessment in community engagement may best be used by CEPs as a process not only to evaluate and understand community engagement programs but also to lead change in higher education in ways consistent with democratic engagement. The data lab is not the end-all assessment solution; it is one effective method to open up a space of shared inquiry, to engage participants across differences, and to stimulate ongoing and change-oriented dialogue. We propose the data lab as a way for CEPs to practice and enact democratically engaged assessment and to intervene in normative assessment culture as part of our work to change higher education. When we approach assessment as collective reflection and ongoing learning, we act in a way that honors both the complexity of knowledge and the nature of democracy by prioritizing cocreation and the right of all to think, to probe, and to generate new meanings, together.

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About the Authors

Sylvia Gale is director of the Bonner Center for Civic Engagement at the University of Richmond. Her research interests focus on innovation assessment, engaged graduate education, and the power of institutional intermediaries to effect change. She received her Ph.D. in english from the University of Texas at Austin.

Terry Dolson is the associate director for community engaged learning at the University of Richmond Bonner Center for Civic Engagement. Her research interests include faculty development, storytelling, and innovative assessment. She received her M.A. in English literature from Virginia Commonwealth University.

Amy L. Howard is assistant vice president of community initiatives at the Bonner Center for Civic Engagement at the University of Richmond. Her research interest focuses on public housing activism in Richmond, Virginia, urban history and campus–community partnerships, and intersectionality and civic engagement. She received her Ph.D. in American studies from the College of William and Mary.

DISSERTATION OVERVIEWS

Dissertation Overview: Building the Capacity of Community Engagement Professionals to Practice Inclusion of Racially Minoritized Students

Kara Trebil-Smith

Abstract

This dissertation overview summarizes a study exploring how community engagement professionals (CEPs) can build their capacity to practice inclusion of racially minoritized students. With a foundation in empowerment evaluation, this participatory action research (PAR) project was designed as a professional development experience within a research study. Study participants included eight CEPs who were recruited through their affiliation with one state Campus Compact network. Qualitative data analysis revealed that as a result of the experience, participants demonstrated mostly cognitive and affective outcomes rather than behavioral outcomes. Positive outcomes were largely attributed to being a part of a community of learners, among individuals with a shared purpose and context. Participants improved their capacity to address personally mediated racism rather than institutionalized racism, reflecting a gap between the values CEPs develop through their education and field experience and the skills they actually practice in their professional roles.

Keywords: community engagement professionals, empowerment evaluation, higher education, inclusion, participatory action research

Introduction and Research Purpose

Since the late 20th century, colleges and universities have been called to reestablish their commitment to the public good and actively contribute to their community's ability to realize social progress for all of its members. Nonetheless, issues of access and equity within higher education persist. As college student demographics continue to shift, experiences of racially minoritized students remain at the forefront of this area of concern.

A logical connection might be expected between community engagement, a field that refers to diversity outcomes to promote its work *(Eyler & Giles, 1999; Fullerton, Reitenauer, & Kerrigan, 2015; Jones & Abes, 2004)*, and equity initiatives on college campuses. In fact, the two rarely coincide *(Dunlap, 1998; Hurtado, 2007; Musil, 2009;*

Saltmarsh, Hartley, & Clayton, 2009). Instead, community engagement efforts are often designed on the assumption that privileged college students (i.e., White, middle and upper class) have a responsibility to help people in need (i.e., low-income people of Color; *Butin, 2006; Gilbride-Brown, 2011; Green, 2003; Mitchell & Donahue, 2009*). In effect, the experiences of historically marginalized students participating in community engagement are largely ignored *(Gilbride-Brown, 2011; Mitchell & Donahue, 2009)*. For colleges and universities to truly meet their democratic commitment, engagement initiatives must be representative and inclusive of diverse student populations. In their absence, community engagement is in danger of perpetuating, rather than disrupting, inequity *(Verjee, 2012)*.

At the head of this work are community engagement professionals (CEPs). These are individuals whose *primary* role on campus is to support, advance, and administrate community–campus engagement *(Dostilio & Perry, 2017)*. Despite being the few professionals whose daily work involves community engagement, their experiences are largely absent from the literature, which tends to focus on the work and influence of faculty and upper level administrators. The purpose of this study was to develop strategies to enable CEPs to build their capacity to practice inclusion of racially minoritized students.

Research Methods

This study utilized a participatory action research (PAR) approach. In PAR, researchers and participants with a common goal of improving their practice or program work in partnership to investigate a problem or research question *(Wadsworth, 1998)*. Elden and Levin *(1991)* refer to the ways that PAR empowers participants to (a) gain insight into and construct new perspectives of their social world, (b) learn how to learn, and (c) develop new opportunities and strategies for taking action.

The PAR project was operationalized using empowerment evaluation, defined by Fetterman and Wandersman *(2005)* as

> an evaluation approach that aims to increase the probability of achieving program success by (1) providing program stakeholders with tools for assessing the planning, implementation, and self-evaluation of their program, and (2) mainstreaming evaluation as part of the planning and management of the program/organization. *(p. 28)*

In other words, empowerment evaluation places equal value on conventional evaluation outcomes and on outcomes realized by the *process* of evaluation *(Patton, 1997)*. This principle encourages and enables practitioners to continue their process of self-evaluation and improvement after the initial cycle of inquiry is complete.

PAR and empowerment evaluation have a number of overlapping goals and principles *(Fetterman & Wandersman, 2005)*. As a point of clarification, the empowerment evaluation process in this study sought to enable participants to evaluate their current work and *identify personal strategies* for practicing inclusion of racially minoritized students within the context of community engagement. The purpose of the broader participatory action research project was to use empowerment evaluation to consider how CEPs can *build their capacity* to practice inclusion of racially minoritized students.

The participants in this project included eight CEPs, representing six predominantly White institutions of higher education in the rural Midwest. Of the eight individuals, six identified as White women. One participant identified as a woman of Color, and one as a White male. Although participants were not selected by race or sex, composition of this group reflects overrepresentation of White women in the field. The group was recruited through their affiliation with one state Campus Compact network.

The entire project lasted 6 months, with two individual interviews bookending the experience. The first component of the group process was to establish a shared online workspace where participants collectively drafted a mission statement for the project. The group agreed on this final version of the statement:

> The mission of this project is to provide an intentional space for community engagement professionals to actively consider the implications of community engagement work for racially minoritized students, and use that lens to critically examine their current practice. Drawing on existing research and engaging in critical reflection, participants are committed to taking necessary action to ensure the needs of racially minoritized students are being addressed.

To begin, participants completed a self-assessment to evaluate themselves and their practice regarding inclusion of racially minoritized students. The tool was created using the multicultural organizational development model *(Pope, Reynolds, & Mueller, 2004)*,

Indicators of a Redefining/Multicultural Organization (Obear, 2011), Professional Competency Areas for Student Affairs Practitioners (ACPA & NASPA, 2010), and *Fostering Cultures of Inclusion in the Classroom (Quaye & Chang, 2012).* The questions were divided into three categories: the self (personal awareness and behaviors), individual work (one's professional practice), and departmental (department/office policies and practice).

Next, the group came together for a half-day retreat to reflect on the results of the self-assessment through guided activities and to begin considering action steps. The group agreed more time was needed, so monthly virtual meetings were scheduled. After 4 months, group members decided to work individually, at their own pace and in their own style, to identify and take action steps. Data was gathered at each phase of the project and was analyzed using first cycle and second cycle coding *(Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).*

Conceptual Framework

Empowerment evaluation, the conceptual framework for this study, is guided by empowerment theory, self-determination theory, evaluation capacity building, process use, and theories of use and action *(Fetterman, 2015).* This foundation is captured in the 10 core principles of empowerment evaluation: improvement, community ownership, inclusion, democratic participation, social justice, community knowledge, evidence-based strategies, capacity building, organizational learning, and accountability *(Fetterman & Wandersman, 2005).*

The PAR project was grounded in these 10 principles with a special emphasis on capacity building and improvement. The approach is designed to "improve, not prove" *(Fetterman, 2001, p. 15),* offering CEPs the opportunity to evaluate their current practice while also building skills for self-evaluation and critical reflection so the benefits of their participation are ongoing. Rather than having an outside evaluator identify problems and possible solutions, CEPs were given tools to do this for themselves, increasing buy-in and the likelihood of acting on their discoveries.

The principles of empowerment evaluation are well aligned with the values of community engagement *(Fetterman, 2001).* It is a democratic process and requires participants to be open and honest in their conversations in order to generate authentic findings. The collaborative experience creates an opportunity for a "dynamic community of transformative learning" *(Fetterman, 2001, p. 7).* At

the heart of empowerment evaluation is an emphasis on community ownership and social justice, ideals that also guide the daily work of CEPs. Not only is the process of empowerment evaluation one that CEPs are more likely to resonate with because of their experiences in community engagement, it also involves a skill set that they can apply in their professional practice.

Findings and Conclusions

Findings revealed that the individual capacity-building outcomes of the project were mostly cognitive and affective. CEPs expressed an increased awareness, particularly in terms of how their own experiences are racialized. Consequently, they described being more conscious of their internal and external reaction in those moments. The group identified new resources and shared a desire to continue their learning, acknowledging blind spots in how their own work has been shaped by race. Individuals demonstrated an increased confidence and discussed feeling more empowered to lean into difficult conversations, centering race even when it might not be well received by colleagues or students. Interestingly, this corresponded with the recognition that racial justice work will always be difficult, and that being uncomfortable is a necessary part of the process.

Although it might be presumed that such cognitive and affective outcomes will result in changes to behavior, there was a marked gap in participants' behavioral outcomes, despite the emphasis on identifying and taking steps toward action. Individuals talked about changing their approach at work, and White participants discussed viewing their practice through a new lens. Many ideas for change were considered. However, few participants identified any actionable changes or plans for implementing change. Their goals for the future tended to emphasize self-work, which is certainly valuable, but is distinct from changing one's practice, particularly in a way that will impact policies and structures.

More specifically, empowerment evaluation is intended to develop individuals' evaluation capacity *(Fetterman & Wandersman, 2005)*, which could be categorized as a behavioral outcome. Beyond an increased capacity for internal assessment, there was little evidence that CEPs walked away from the project more equipped to conduct evaluation. Interestingly, they spoke to the value of the practice but looked to external sources (e.g., Campus Compact) to perform the work rather than seeing themselves as producing evaluative information.

In considering ways to build capacity, participants attributed the outcomes they achieved to the group process. The CEPs found value in being a part of a community of learners, a core tenet of empowerment evaluation *(Fetterman & Wandersman, 2005)*. Participants expressed appreciation for their peers and for the opportunity to learn with and from others who share the same commitment and challenges. Collectively, the group demonstrated a commitment to continuously improving their practice and identified their relationships with one another as essential to that process. Notably, participants acknowledged that knowing one another beforehand and having a shared context (i.e., private schools in a mostly White, rural state) was also important in their learning and willingness to be open.

Significance of the Research

This study contributes to a relatively small body of knowledge around CEPs and considers how these individuals shape, and are shaped by, the field. The findings highlight a gap between what CEPs come to value through the education and professional development they receive as a part of the field, such as concern with social justice and systemic change *(Clark & Nugent, 2011; Mitchell, 2008; Rosenberger, 2000; Saltmarsh, Hartley, & Clayton, 2009)*, and the skills they develop and practice through their role as CEPs.

When considering levels of racism *(Jones, 2000)*, participants showed greater capacity for addressing personally mediated racism than for disrupting institutionalized racism. For the most part, the emphasis was on individual identities rather than structures and systems. In other words, participants spoke more about White privilege than White supremacy. This parallels criticism of community engagement in higher education that the work emphasizes changes for individuals rather than addressing systemic and structural inequity *(Eby, 1998; Herzberg, 1994; O'Grady, 2000; Rosenberger, 2000)*.

CEPs generally felt that their institutional power was limited, and those who had been in their role for multiple years reflected on how much their responsibilities shift as changes occur within their institution. They commented on reporting lines and organizational priorities that impact their day-to-day work. Perhaps most notable, it was clear that participants consistently feel they have too much to do in too little time and that the majority of their time is spent on reactionary rather than strategic work.

Although these factors do not fully explain the gap in behavioral outcomes, it is worth considering the challenge CEPs face when applying their professional learning from the community engagement field to individual contexts that vary considerably. In particular, newer professionals might be seeking more support, but the guidance they receive from their institutional superiors will likely differ from that provided by the broader field.

The findings offer insight into the experiences of CEPs as they work to support equity and racial justice on campus. Additionally, results of the evaluation process can be examined to consider what aspects of the experience contributed to CEPs' learning and growth, why behavioral outcomes were significantly fewer than cognitive and affective, and what types of experiences might achieve different results.

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About the Author

Kara Trebil-Smith is the director of community and civic engagement at Coe College in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, where she manages community engagement initiatives across campus and collaborates with faculty and students to develop ongoing community–campus partnerships. Her research focuses on building the capacity of community engagement professionals and the process of developing effective partnerships. She received her Ed.D. in higher education from the University of Denver.