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

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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

"*M*y 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 connectedness 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 organization that is advancing the public purpose 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, reciprocal engagement with others (students, faculty, staff, and community 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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