The Value of Community: Stakeholder Perspectives at an Urban-Serving Research University

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Abstract

Urban-serving research universities (USRUs) address issues of access, community engagement, and development within urban areas, but internal and external forces complicate their place-based missions. By embracing contradictions within stakeholder viewpoints, strategic planning can foster fruitful, institutionalized engagement. This mixed-methods study analyzed responses to a core values survey that was disseminated to stakeholders at a USRU to explore the question "What do the ratings of and comments about the *community-minded* value reveal about possible tensions and opportunities in how stakeholders describe a USRU's fulfillment of its *community-minded* value?" Through stakeholder and paradox theory, we examined how stakeholder perspectives uncover tensions and opportunities related to the *community-minded* value. Whereas stakeholder theory emphasized the importance of valuing the interests of all stakeholders, paradox theory illustrated how coexisting-but-divergent perspectives on defining, approaching, and engaging community could help to advance community engagement goals.

Keywords: community engagement, urban-serving research university, strategic planning, stakeholder theory, paradox theory

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Urban-serving research universities (USRUs) fulfill a unique, complex mission in higher education, addressing issues of educational access, community support, and urban development. Because USRUs are "composed of the city they inhabit" (Zerquera, 2016, p. 137), place consciousness is embedded within their institutional mission but is complicated by conflicting ideas about how USRUs should best engage with and support the communities in which they are anchored (Moore, 2014) while attending to other institutional priorities (Zerquera & Doran, 2017).

Institutional stakeholders have different definitions of the term "community" and varied conceptions of the relationship between the community and university (Gavazzi, 2015), which can result in contradictory approaches to fulfilling the USRU's mission. For example, some stakeholders may perceive or define community-university engagement as unidirectional, believing that the university should provide support to the community, whereas others may advocate two-way engagement, which invites collaboration and reciprocity between campus and community stakeholders (Weerts & Sandmann, 2008). Janke and Medlin (2015) made a distinction between more unidirectional "public service" and more reciprocal and mutually beneficial "community engagement" (pp. 128–129).

It is important for USRUs to explore how stakeholders understand and value the commitment to the community, acknowledge the contradictions and tensions within their viewpoints, and implement creative solutions that leverage and balance different approaches (Bowers, 2017; Zerquera, 2016). A strategic planning process provides an opportunity for stakeholders to articulate their institutional values; through such a process, institutions can engage diverse perspectives and subsequently shape priorities that reflect complex interests (Dostilio & Welch, 2019; Friedman et al., 2014).

This study applied stakeholder theory (Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Freeman, 1984/2010) in conjunction with paradox theory (Pinto, 2019; Smith & Lewis, 2011) to explore one institution's leveraging of a strategic planning process to understand stakeholders' perceptions of the value of community. Early in the process, a mid-Atlantic USRU in a large urban area disseminated a survey to internal and external stakeholders. Respondents were invited to select what they perceived to be the top five core values of the USRU, to rate how well the institution was fulfilling selected values, and to provide qualitative feedback on how the institution could better fulfill the values. The top five values identified by respondents were *diverse*, *community-minded*, *inclusive*, *hard-working*, and *affordable*. We selected *community-minded*, the second-most selected value, as the basis for this secondary analysis because the initial analysis of data for institutional purposes revealed diverse and even paradoxical perspectives on how the university should approach its community engagement and development efforts. Additionally, survey responses captured tensions that have existed between the institution and community in recent years. For this study, we analyzed how stakeholder groups who selected *community-minded* rated the value, then conducted qualitative analysis of open-ended responses to answer the research question:

> What do the ratings of and comments about the *community-minded* value reveal about possible tensions and opportunities in how stakeholders describe a USRU's fulfillment of its *community-minded* value?

Literature Review

Urban-serving institutions are anchor institutions, supporting social and economic growth through job creation, community and cultural development, and industry expansion (Davis & Walker, 2019; Friedman et al., 2014; Harris & Holley, 2016; Norris & Weiss, 2019; Taylor & Luter, 2013). Their complex mission involves a commitment to access, equitable student outcomes, diversity, and reciprocal engagement with the city and community in which they are located (Davis & Walker, 2019). USRUs further expand the urban-serving mission through a commitment to community-based research and in collaboration with diverse constituents to address urban challenges

(Zerquera & Doran, 2017). Zerquera (2016) described USRUs as "model institutional citizen[s]" responsible for advancing the public good while working to solve urban problems. Importantly, USRUs reciprocally rely on their communities as their "lifeblood" (Horvat & Shaw, 1999, p. 103).

Community-Related Tensions Among USRU Stakeholders

Although the fulfillment of USRUs' complex mission requires the involvement of internal and external stakeholders, the research on who these groups include and how they interact is underdeveloped (Harris & Holley, 2016). Centering stakeholders' perspectives and ideas has proven critical to the success of community–university collaborations (Cantor et al., 2013), but diverse stakeholder involvement has also resulted in tensions at USRUs. Institutional culture, norms, and practices can create obstacles to engagement and tension among stakeholders (Moore, 2014; Stachowiak et al., 2013), yet comprehensive stakeholder involvement is seen as essential to institutionalizing community engagement (Murrah-Hanson & Sandmann, 2021; van Schyndel et al., 2019).

One tension arises in defining *community* as universities engage different and more expansive notions of communities. Universities participate in both internal and external communities (Jongbloed et al., 2008), and globalization of higher education has further broadened notions of community (Harris & Holley, 2016). Tensions can also arise in how stakeholders perceive or approach engagement (Addie, 2019; Murrah-Hanson & Sandmann, 2021). Within institutions, divergent definitions can fragment or misalign community engagement efforts, which can cause frustration (Murrah-Hanson & Sandmann, 2021). Additionally, town–gown relationships have often reinforced barriers and inequitable power dynamics between universities and communities, particularly when universities have not engaged community members (Bruning et al., 2006; Sandmann & Weerts, 2008; Weerts & Sandmann, 2008). Some university–community engagement initiatives tend to be unidirectional, suggesting that institutional experts would reach out into the community but rarely solicit community feedback (Bruning et al., 2006; Moore, 2014). Unidirectional public service can allow institutions to support the community through key resources and programs (Janke & Medlin, 2015). However,

as Cantor et al. (2013) illustrated, unidirectional practices can have harmful effects on the community, for example, by displacing community members and perpetuating physical and perceptual barriers between the campus and community. Furthermore, such practices can cause community members to feel understandably skeptical about future collaborations with the university.

In recent decades, universities have worked to cultivate two-way approaches that emphasize reciprocal collaboration with the community (Cantor et al., 2013; Weerts & Sandmann, 2008), which can prevent the omission of community members from decision-making processes (Moore, 2014). Moore advocated a shift from outcome-focused engagement, during which the university seeks to act within the community it serves, to engagement as a process, which can help to dismantle boundaries between universities and communities.

USRUs' social and spatial contexts can also create tensions, and social issues can strain internal and external stakeholder relationships. For example, in seeking to ensure campus safety, institutional leaders may restrict community access to campus, and students' demand for off-campus housing can create conflict with local residents (Davis & Walker, 2019; Harris & Holley, 2016). Tensions also arise when institutions want to expand their boundaries. Urban anchor institutions often intend land development to serve both community needs and university goals (Harris & Holley, 2016), but such initiatives do not always consider community members' perspectives and can perpetuate skepticism and animosity toward university projects (Cantor et al., 2013).

Within the USRU, other tensions exist, such as between universities' commitments to engagement and the ways in which that engagement is perceived as valued, resourced, and rewarded (Borkoski & Prosser, 2020). At times, engagement, such as through faculty-led community-based research, is promoted in word and mission but is not recognized through reward systems like tenure and promotion (Franz et al., 2012; Moore, 2014; O'Meara, 2011; O'Meara & Saltmarsh, 2016; Purcell et al., 2020; Zerquera & Doran, 2017). Tensions also exist between traditional research and community-engaged scholarship, but as O'Meara and Saltmarsh (2016) explained, both types of research have a place in the academy, and networks and alliances between and across groups of researchers can help to create opportunities for mutual support and benefit. Siloing within institutions can also complicate or obscure the community emphasis of the USRU mission; not all stakeholders, offices, or colleges may approach engagement the same way or have a comprehensive understanding of how the university is working to fulfill its mission (Franz et al., 2012). Institutionalization through the formal development and adoption of campuswide language, practices, and priorities of the community-engagement mission at USRUs can help to surface internal and external tensions and suggest strategic pathways for mission fulfillment that takes into account diverse stakeholder interests (Franz et al., 2012; Holland, 1997; Murrah-Hanson & Sandmann, 2021; Norris & Weiss, 2019).

The Role of Strategic Planning

Strategic planning is a valuable tool for advancing a USRU's approach to fulfilling its place-based mission (Dostilio & Welch, 2019). Institutionalized commitment to a community-engaged mission begins with strategic planning (Friedman et al., 2014), a mechanism that helps urban institutions reflect on the benefits and risks they pose to their communities (Davis & Walker, 2019) and articulate engagement priorities (Franz et al., 2012; Norris & Weiss, 2019). Strategic planning engages diverse stakeholders (Dostilio & Welch, 2019; Hoy & Johnson, 2013) and empowers them to drive change (Addie, 2019). By embracing contradictions within stakeholder viewpoints, strategic planning can foster fruitful engagement (Bowers, 2017) and ensure that engagement is "embedded" as an institutional priority (Murrah-Hanson & Sandmann, 2021, p. 12). For the institution in this study, an added benefit from a survey designed to identify core values was the ability to recognize and understand tensions inherent in these values, particularly around the concept of community engagement. Without this survey, the USRU might not have understood or taken into account those tensions when outlining strategic priorities.

Theoretical Frameworks: Stakeholder Theory and Paradox Theory

The theoretical frameworks of stakeholder theory and paradox theory (Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Freeman, 1984/2010; Smith & Lewis, 2011) inform our analysis of how USRU stakeholders perceive tensions and opportunities related to the fulfillment of

the *community-minded* value. The growing body of literature applying these frameworks to higher education contexts (Bowers, 2017; Jongbloed et al., 2008; Langrafe et al., 2020; Stachowiak et al., 2013; Strier, 2014) suggests that these frameworks provide insight into stakeholder values and strategic priorities at USRUs. The joint application of these frameworks, an emerging theoretical approach, uses stakeholder theory to understand what must be done to manage conflicting interests and paradox theory to identify innovative approaches to conflict management and resolution (Pinto, 2019).

Stakeholder theory posits that all stakeholders, both internal and external, have legitimate interests to which organizational leaders must attend (Donaldson & Preston, 1995). Recent developments in stakeholder theory have focused on creating value through enhanced stakeholder relationships and broader recognition of what can have value (Freeman et al., 2020; Langrafe et al., 2020). According to Freeman et al., stakeholder theory promotes a "value network" (p. 217) in which all stakeholders contribute to and benefit from complex organizational systems; as systems create new values, stakeholder theory recognizes that stakeholders are human, not merely economic, and reinforces the significance of values beyond profit (Freeman et al., 2020; Langrafe et al., 2020). Stakeholders are not homogeneous but hold diverse viewpoints and therefore must be engaged through different approaches (Harris & Holley, 2016). As Jongbloed et al. (2008) noted in their application of stakeholder theory to understanding complex relationships between universities and their communities, organizational commitment to stakeholders should be dialogic, a tool through which universities can understand stakeholder values and seek ways to continually improve. By involving stakeholders in identifying values and setting priorities, institutions may better attend to stakeholders' "demands and values" and determine whether stakeholder and institutional goals align (Langrafe et al., 2020). Murrah-Hanson and Sandmann (2021) also identified comprehensive stakeholder involvement as critical to the "paradigm shift" (p. 11) of institutionalized community engagement. Thus, stakeholder theory helps us equitably consider the diverse interests of USRU stakeholders as expressed through a strategic planning process and helps us to consider the significance of those perspectives in building a sustainable campuswide commitment to community engagement.

Paradox theory acknowledges and embraces the contradictions and tensions that inevitably arise in an organization, viewing seemingly incompatible differences as opportunities for creative, flexible solutions and organizational learning (Pinto, 2019; Smith & Lewis, 2011). Smith and Lewis developed a framework including four types of paradoxes found within organizations:

- *learning paradoxes*, which capture growth and innovation efforts that build upon and dismantle the past;

- *belonging paradoxes*, which capture tensions related to identity, such as between autonomous individuals and the groups of which they are members;

- *organizing paradoxes*, which capture conflicting structures, strategies, and approaches employed to attain certain goals; and

- *performing paradoxes*, which capture the diverse and often conflicting demands and goals of internal and external stakeholder groups.

Many of these paradoxes may be present at USRUs. For example, *learning* paradoxes may arise when innovative facilities or practices threaten historical or cultural practices and traditions within or beyond the university's boundaries. *Belonging* paradoxes may arise when an individual faculty member's community engagement goals or values, such as a commitment to community-engaged scholarship, do not align with those of the department or institution. *Organizing* paradoxes may arise within community partnerships—as the USRU seeks collaboration and reciprocity, it may simultaneously seek to maintain control over how the partnership functions. *Performing* paradoxes may occur when different stakeholders emphasize different measures of success, such as the conflict between recruiting and enrolling local students as opposed to an increasingly global student body. Conflicts can also occur between these types of paradoxes; for example, faculty who have a personal commitment to community engagement but feel compelled to bring in high-profile grant funding in service of a USRU's research mission may illustrate a *performing::belonging* paradox (Smith & Lewis, 2011).

In an examination of paradoxes found

within university–community partnerships, Strier (2014) advocated a culturally embedded understanding of paradox as a way to foster dialogue about tensions within partnerships. Paradox theory can also help to identify tensions and suggest ways in which divergent perspectives can inform solutions (Bowers, 2017; Strier, 2014). Thus, paradox theory helps us to understand the tensions and contradictions embedded within strategic interests of USRU stakeholders and can suggest ways in which the institution can leverage these contradictions to innovatively attend to stakeholder values. An important first step in achieving this understanding is collecting the stakeholder perspectives that determine how stakeholders define and place "community" among institutional values and priorities.

Methodology

This study analyzed a subset of responses to a survey on core values that was disseminated to a USRU's faculty, administrators, staff, students, alumni, donors, and family members of students in January 2021. The survey was distributed by email to over 244,000 individuals; 8,753 responses were received. As the data were obtained through a survey conducted as part of the institution's strategic planning process, IRB approval was not needed for the initial data collection. The Office of the Provost granted permission to conduct this secondary analysis of institutional data.

Site Description

North Urban University (NUU; a pseudonym) is a state-related comprehensive research university ranked as a "highest research activity" university in the Carnegie Classification. NUU's main campus is in a major metropolitan area in the mid-Atlantic United States and serves as a major economic contributor to its anchor city and state. NUU has three additional campuses within the anchor city, two elsewhere in the state, and two international campuses. The majority of NUU's schools and colleges are located on the main campus. Since its founding in the late 19th century, NUU has had an explicit commitment to providing educational opportunities to those whose access may be limited. The university also has a long-standing reputation as the city's public university. However, in recent years, disagreement has arisen over proposed campus development projects and the institution's impact on the surrounding community, leading to tensions and distrust that have complicated the community–university relationship. As the institution has enrolled an increasingly national and global student body, NUU has experienced pressure to recruit and admit more students from neighborhoods around campus. Although NUU participates in some successful community–university partnerships, community members' positive perceptions of institutional boundary spanners sometimes contrast with critical perceptions of the whole institution (Winfield et al., 2022).

Data Collection and Sample

Respondents were asked to select what they perceived to be NUU's top five core values via a survey. The survey included a randomized list of 50 values as well as write-in space for up to five additional values. Respondents were then asked to rate (0–10) the extent to which NUU embodied each selected value. For the selected values, respondents were invited to answer the open-ended question "Looking to the future, what could [NUU] do to continue to fulfill or to better align with these values?"

Community-minded was selected 2,214 times (25.3% of submissions), the second-most-selected value. Of responses that selected *community-minded*, 2,091 provided a rating and 827 provided a comment. Respondents could also identify membership in one or more stakeholder groups (*administration/staff*, *alumni*, *donor*, *faculty*, *parent/family member*, and *student*) and designate a primary stakeholder affiliation; 1,820 responses provided a primary affiliation, and 582 responses identified two or more affiliations. For this study, 123 responses that selected the *community-minded* value but provided neither a rating nor a comment were excluded, resulting in an analytic sample of 2,091.

Data Analysis

This mixed-methods analysis employed a convergent design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), as both quantitative and qualitative data were collected simultaneously during the institutional survey administration. During the strategic planning analyses, the authors coded the open-ended responses to identify themes as to how the institution could fulfill the value. The research question for this study emerged through that process. To explore this research question,

the researchers then reviewed the data set and developed a new set of codes to reflect stakeholder perspectives on community. Codes were developed through a conventional content analysis of the open-ended responses, which allowed categories to emerge inductively throughout the coding process (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The researchers reviewed the data, discussed emergent themes, and developed and reviewed parent and child codes to address the research question. During the initial round of coding, it became clear that findings could be interpreted through the theoretical frameworks of stakeholder and paradox theory, which informed the synthesis of codes into themes (Creswell & Creswell Báez, 2021). All responses were coded using the qualitative analysis tools in Dedoose; although the first author coded the majority of responses, both authors shared access to the Dedoose project, and the researchers conferred on a weekly basis throughout the coding process to confirm findings as they emerged.

To understand the composition of stakeholder groups, the researchers identified what percentage of overall respondents from each primary affiliation group selected *community-minded* as a top five value and reviewed how many stakeholders identified multiple affiliations. To examine the different average ratings of the *community-minded* value across stakeholder groups, an ANOVA was conducted to determine whether there were statistically significant between-group differences.

Findings

Stakeholder Participation

All six stakeholder groups included in the values survey instrument—*administration/ staff*, *alumni*, *donor*, *faculty*, *parent/family member*, and *student*—were represented as primary affiliations for respondents who selected the *community-minded* value. All but *student* were selected as additional affiliations (Table 1), which may reflect a tacit understanding that students are primary institutional stakeholders. The frequent selection of *donor* and *parent/family member* as additional affiliations may suggest that these stakeholder groups are perceived to have less influence on institutional strategic direction and values (Jongbloed et al., 2008).

Value Ratings

The overall and stakeholder group ratings of how well NUU embodied the *community-minded* value suggested a tension between the perceived importance of the value and NUU's success in committing to that value. On average, *community-minded* was rated 7.72, the second lowest rating of the top 10 most selected values. Among stakeholder

Table 1. Total Selections and Average Rating of Community-Minded Value by Stakeholder Group

Stakeholder group	Primary affiliation	Additional affiliation	Average rating
Faculty	275	59	7.28
Administration/staff	340	129	7.72
Student	815	0	7.73
Alumni	242	243	7.83
Parent/family member	138	227	8.27
Donor	10	222	8.5
No affiliation provided	271		7.76
Total	2,091	880	7.72

Note. Total average does not equal calculated mean of stakeholder groups because groups' means are unweighted. Average rating calculated according to primary affiliation. More than one affiliation was provided in 582 responses; respondents could select up to six affiliations.

groups, *community-minded* mean scores ranged from 7.28 to 8.5 (Table 1). One-way ANOVA showed a statistically significant difference in ratings between stakeholder groups ($F(6, 126) = 4.98$, $p < .001$). A Tukey post hoc test showed significant differences between faculty and alumni ($p < .05$), students ($p < .05$), and parents/family members ($p < .001$). Lower faculty ratings may reflect faculty's close commitment to engaged scholarship, which may be at odds with institutional pressure to prioritize higher profile, better funded research (Bowers, 2017; Zerquera & Doran, 2017).

Additionally, the post hoc test showed significant differences between parents/family members and students ($p < 0.1$) and administration/staff ($p < 0.1$). These findings suggest that parents/family members perceived a higher level of fulfillment of the *community-minded* value than administration/staff, faculty, or students. As we will discuss in our analysis of open-ended findings, this result may suggest that stakeholders involved in the daily operations of the institution tended to rank the fulfillment of the *community-minded* value more critically than those more removed from the institution.

Open-Ended Responses

Qualitative analysis provided rich insights on complex stakeholder perspectives. The responses from each stakeholder group suggested that each group interpreted the *community-minded* value in distinct ways. Although overlap occurred among responses from different groups, as did considerable variety within each group's responses, the following summaries help to highlight the diverse perspectives that, according to stakeholder theory, must be considered in institutional decision-making processes (Freeman et al., 2020; Langrafe et al., 2020) in order to institutionalize engagement (Murrah-Hanson & Sandmann, 2021) in ways that reflect the heterogeneous interests of stakeholders (Harris & Holley, 2016). We have identified an overarching theme that encapsulates the predominant perspectives of each stakeholder group based on their primary affiliation; the total number of qualitative responses provided for each group is also listed. (One response included a comment but did not provide an affiliation with any stakeholder group and so is not reflected in any *n* for qualitative responses.)

- Faculty: critical perceptions of in-

stitutional commitment to engagement ($n = 147$)

- Administration and staff: institutionalization and targeted approaches to engagement ($n = 177$)

- Students: broad support and campus as community ($n = 292$)

- Alumni: broad support and broadened community ($n = 138$)

- Parents and family members: support for community development and engagement ($n = 65$)

- Donors: improved community relations ($n = 7$)

Below, we discuss the characteristics of each group's responses, beginning with the group that gave the lowest average rating of the *community-minded* value and progressing to the group that gave the highest average rating. Interestingly, this organization reflects a roughly inverse relationship with stakeholder groups' approximate level of current institutional engagement—faculty and administration/staff provided the lowest scores, whereas parents/family members and donors provided the highest.

Faculty: Critical Perceptions of Institutional Commitment to Engagement

Faculty responses were often distinctly critical of NUU's commitment to community engagement; fewer than 13% of responses from faculty affirmed that NUU was upholding the *community-minded* value, compared to between 23% and 43% in responses from all other stakeholder groups. This finding is consistent with their lower ratings of the *community-minded* value compared to other stakeholders and consistent with other research that has shown that faculty perceive institutions to value research over service-learning (Borkoski & Prosser, 2020), which complicates institutions' fulfillment of their public missions (Papadimitriou, 2020). Faculty described a disconnect between how NUU perceives its community work and how the community perceives that commitment. One faculty member commented that "the faculty and students by and large are MUCH more community-minded than the administration and board of trustees," viewing the institution's business operations as at odds with access, equity, and social justice. Another faculty member suggested that while the university purported to serve the

community, it actually reinforced a "gated community effect" that created a "very deliberate border vacuum" between NUU and its surrounding neighborhoods. Faculty called for broad representation of community members on school and university committees and the Board of Trustees and also advocated more community–university partnerships. Many faculty expressed interest in embedding community engagement into the curricula and missions of all schools and colleges. Some faculty felt that NUU lacked infrastructure, support, incentives, and rewards for faculty–led community engagement work. Faculty suggested ways to strengthen community engagement, such as partnerships with local schools, investment in community programs, and public health services.

Administration and Staff: Institutionalization and Targeted Approaches to Engagement

Administration/staff responses frequently emphasized the importance of considering the needs of the community. Nearly a quarter of responses from administrators and staff members called for including community members in decision–making and keeping the community engaged in NUU's actions. As one respondent wrote, "[NUU should] engage more deeply with the [local] community. Recruit [local] students, engage residents in projects, build collaborative/ongoing relationships with neighborhood leaders, ensure all new construction is developed with local residents." Additionally, these stakeholders acknowledged that some community engagement efforts were siloed. They called for NUU to institutionalize the commitment to the *community–minded* value and involve more institutional stakeholders through a number of specific recommendations, including establishing a "center for civic engagement" or similar office, incorporating engagement into the curriculum, and rewarding and resourcing current projects. Administrators and staff also described direct supports to the community, such as educational opportunities through courses and scholarships, partnerships with local K–12 schools, health services, community cleanup initiatives, and support for local businesses.

Students: Broad Support and Campus as Community

Students' responses were often broad, describing a desire for more outreach opportunities in the community but offering limited suggestions on how community engagement might best be accomplished. Some of the most specific responses related to students' behavior in the community; some students expressed concern that loud parties, trash, and gentrified apartment buildings disrupted local residents, and that more could be done to "educate [NUU] students about how to properly respect the surrounding communities." Although more than half of student responses mentioned the importance of community, approximately a third of those responses focused primarily on NUU as a community, rather than the relationship between NUU and the surrounding neighborhoods. As one student wrote, "I believe the close knit campus and general positive demeanor of professors and staff are the two greatest contributors to this attribute." This comment suggested that not all students defined the *community–minded* value in ways that reflect community engagement as an institutional priority.

Alumni: Broad Support and Broadened Community

Although alumni responses echoed other stakeholder groups' calls for continued engagement with community members and suggestions for supports within the local community, recommendations were typically broad or generic. For example, responses suggested that NUU could "engage with and uplift the surrounding community" through volunteer opportunities, unspecified opportunities for students, and more (but again unspecified) partnerships. Similarly, alumni broadly suggested that NUU should "be more mindful" of and "be true to the neighborhood and city" through school and neighborhood partnerships, employment opportunities for community residents, community centers, and community service, but these recommendations were not typically developed. However, alumni expressed more concerns about the proposed stadium than any other stakeholder group. Alumni also recommended a more expansive definition of community in virtual, state, and global contexts.

Parents and Family Members: Support for Community Development and Engagement

Parent/family member responses included more suggestions to develop the community around NUU through building projects (some respondents even expressed support for the proposed stadium), new businesses, and beautification initiatives. Sometimes

these recommendations simultaneously acknowledged the importance of preserving neighborhoods and avoiding gentrification, but other responses implied that development would equally benefit both NUU and its surrounding communities. For example, although one parent acknowledged "an invisible wall" between NUU and community residents, another suggested that NUU should "continue to purchase properties surrounding [NUU] . . . to clean up the community." Parent/family member responses also expressed a desire for students to more fully engage with and explore the surrounding areas, as a way to both enrich students' academic experiences and strengthen connections with the community. For example, one response suggested that NUU could "allow class scheduling flexibility to give students time to engage"; another recommended "continued integration of academic programs with the surrounding . . . community."

Donors: Improved Community Relations

The few donors who selected *community-minded* as a value focused on the connection between NUU and its community, acknowledging the "unbelievable focus by [NUU] to the Community" while calling for continued "work to improve the [urban] area." Most of these respondents emphasized the need for improved community relations through intentional involvement of community members in decision-making and cultivation of communication channels between NUU and community members.

Paradoxes Within the *Community-Minded* Value

As the above analysis of each stakeholder group's responses suggests, different and potentially conflicting understandings of the *community-minded* value exist not only within but also between groups. A thematic analysis of the data set as a whole brought tensions and conflicting views into sharper relief. However, these tensions—as understood through paradox theory—need not be reconciled; rather, they can explicitly or implicitly suggest opportunities for innovative solutions that will address stakeholders' values and advance community priorities (Bowers, 2017; Smith & Lewis, 2011; Strier, 2014). Three primary themes emerged in our analysis of paradoxes: *definition paradoxes*, *community relations paradoxes*, and *role/ impact paradoxes*.

Definition Paradoxes

Stakeholders defined or described *community* as local, urban, regional/global, or internal and called for NUU to better fulfill the *community-minded* value by serving one or more of these communities. Respondents most often connected the fulfillment of the value to the local community, frequently acknowledging the importance of the surrounding neighborhoods to NUU. As one faculty member wrote, "engaging with the [local] community is very important for the institution, for our students, and for the community."

Some responses acknowledged existing barriers or potential connections between the various communities that stakeholders defined. For example, a student called for NUU to "continue to build a bridge between students and the surrounding community," suggesting a persistent and important link between the university and the neighborhood it anchors. Similarly, a parent/ family member suggested that NUU should "strengthen ties with the community, both inside the [NUU] community as well as the surrounding community." Although this example acknowledged that multiple definitions of *community* are salient to NUU, the respondent's distinction between an internal and external community may reflect real or perceived divisions between communities that may perpetuate tensions.

Some responses more explicitly acknowledged a perceived shift in how NUU has prioritized communities and how the *community-minded* value is not consistently upheld, depending on how "community" is defined. An alumni respondent wrote, "As its reputation has improved, [NUU] is focused less on the immediate community surrounding the university. It does provide a 'community atmosphere' within many of its colleges." Other respondents felt that a more expansive definition of community may align with NUU's strategic direction. For example, a member of the administration/staff observed, "[NUU's] sense of community is located to [its city] for the most part. [NUU] may want to consider branching across the state and country from programs, to recruitment to branch campuses." Such perspectives may reflect the globalization of higher education that affects USRUs even as they remain rooted to their cities (Harris & Holley, 2016; Zerquera, 2016).

Often, these conflicting and overlapping

definitions of *community* exposed *belonging paradoxes* related to stakeholder perceptions of how NUU fosters community membership (Smith & Lewis, 2011; Strier, 2014). Because individual stakeholders may identify more strongly as members of particular NUU communities, NUU must strive to articulate links between the communities it encompasses and to understand the value of each community to stakeholders and to institutional strategy. Rather than prioritizing or attempting to eliminate one or more communities, embracing the complexity of definition paradoxes can help to ensure that all stakeholders can locate themselves within NUU and can seek opportunities for creativity and innovation across communities (Bowers, 2017; Pinto, 2019; Smith & Lewis, 2011).

Community Relations Paradoxes

Stakeholders made general and specific calls for NUU to engage with or in the community. Recommendations included both unidirectional and two-directional approaches to engagement (Weerts & Sandmann, 2008), suggesting that respondents did not share consistent or clear definitions of community engagement (Murrah-Hanson & Sandmann, 2021). More unidirectional recommendations called for outreach into the community or prioritized institutional actions and perspectives over input from community members. For example, one student suggested that "[NUU] should align with student organizations to help advance community outreach," and an administrator/staff member said NUU should "continue to keep the people who live in the community in mind when making decisions that will impact their lives." Although these comments may not intentionally exclude community members' perspectives, such responses do not necessarily give community members agency or view them as key stakeholders. In contrast, more two-directional responses emphasized partnerships and relationship building. As one parent/family member wrote,

> Being situated in [the city] where [NUU] is located requires that the school not only engages with the surrounding community, but truly partners with the surrounding community when making decisions and policies that will impact the neighborhood. The only way to know if there is an impact is to have regular, on-going communication with

elected officials and neighborhood groups.

The range of stakeholder responses about how the institution should fulfill the *community-minded* value suggested important *organizing paradoxes* embedded within how NUU approaches its community relations, highlighting divergent perspectives on how community engagement should be structured and who should lead or control engagement (Smith & Lewis, 2011).

Although paradoxical approaches to community relations emerged across responses, some respondents spoke directly to the tensions between NUU and its surrounding communities. For example, an administrator/staff member observed that "[NUU] has some fantastic community-facing programs that do an excellent job of building strong relationships with the community. That being said—[NUU] still does not have a positive representation with most community members." This perspective captures a *belonging::organizing* paradox; even as program partnerships can build positive relationships between institutional boundary spanners and community members, negative perceptions of the institution as a whole may persist within anchor communities. Such experiences reflect community members' positive attitudes toward boundary spanners even when institutions have been viewed as disingenuous (Weerts & Sandmann, 2008). A faculty member articulated a similar concern: "I think [community-mindedness] is where [NUU] least achieves its stated values—except perhaps through the hospital and clinics, which do clearly serve the community."

Through their paradoxical perspective that NUU was both serving and failing the community, both of these responses go on to capture opportunities for innovative, more effective value fulfillment. The faculty member advocated for "a decisive reorientation of the university toward becoming a much stronger engine for supporting the [surrounding] area." The administrator/staff member wrote, "I envision a University that is on the cutting edge of 'town-gown' relationships and actively working alongside [residents of the local neighborhood] to define what positive community-university partnerships look like."

A tension related to how community members are involved in fulfilling the *community-minded* value was reflected in

responses as well as the survey distribution design. Many respondents across all stakeholder groups acknowledged community members, who were not explicitly included in the strategic planning survey administration, as key stakeholders, suggesting that external stakeholders must be equitably engaged even as engagement is formally institutionalized (Strier, 2014). One faculty respondent suggested a comprehensive approach to including community members in this institutionalization: "Recruit diverse community members into board of trustees. Establish systematic and continuous, as well as ad-hoc, collaborative university–community teams and integrate them fully into strategic planning and project operationalizations. Compensate community participants in these teams." The omission of community members as a key stakeholder group in a survey that invited respondents to reflect on the *community-minded* value may reflect a *performing paradox* (Smith & Lewis, 2011)—although many NUU stakeholders view community engagement as mission-centric, excluding external stakeholder voices prioritizes institutional approaches to community over community-voiced needs. As suggested in the preceding quote, institutionalization and community-embeddedness need not be exclusive; this paradox could foster creative, intentional engagement of community members not only through discrete partnerships, but through university-sponsored town halls, committees, and planning processes.

Role/Impact Paradoxes

Stakeholders shared conflicting views on the role of the university in the community, highlighting the ways in which NUU's urban-serving mission is complicated by campus development projects and land acquisition, student residents' behavior, and NUU's responses to current events and their community impacts. The *community-minded* value was viewed as central to NUU's legacy, but some respondents considered that mission incompatible with the university's behavior in its anchor community in ways that could be addressed only through sweeping changes, as one administrator/staff member expressed:

> So much damage has been done in [NUU's] surrounding community over the past 50–60 years that distrust is high among the residents. No matter what we do, it will look patronizing and paternalistic. We

need to engage the community more, and offer centers to assist with employment, tax preparation, a food pantry (for the community), free healthcare options, also perhaps free non-credit classes for the neighborhood. Also, though we can't control the local landlords and developers, we must exert some control over students living in the area, at the very least contracting a private trash removal service to circulate through the immediate area during move-out week. We might also provide a contact point for neighbors to complain about problem student housing before it becomes an issue.

Many of the tensions related to the university's role and impacts can be understood as *learning paradoxes* (Smith & Lewis, 2011)—on the one hand, NUU is committed to changes and innovations perceived as strengthening the institution's standing in and economic support of the community; on the other hand, these changes and innovations are seen as destructive of history and culture.

Gentrification and displacement of local residents was one area of concern. As one administrator/staff member observed, "I understand that we need progress, but if you're going to take over neighborhoods we need to help employ those individuals." A student commented, "[NUU] has a reputation for being a driver of gentrification and displacement, which goes against its commitment to community."

Some concerns about community impacts were tied to more specific development projects. A number of respondents criticized NUU's proposal to build a stadium near its main campus. Although some saw this and other development projects as economically beneficial to and respectful of the local neighborhood, other respondents identified campus expansion initiatives as a violation of community residents' rights and a destructive force within surrounding neighborhoods that was driving up rent and restricting housing availability.

Respondents perceived students—many of whom reside in off-campus neighborhood housing—as a source of tension in the community. One student respondent felt that students needed "to be aware of the fact that they are living within a community, within people's homes." Although

respondents felt that structured student engagement—through service-learning, for example—could be a way to fulfill the *community-minded* value, student residence within the community could negatively impact community engagement. As another student wrote,

> [NUU] likes to send students out to help the community at large, but many people living in the zip codes surrounding [NUU] constantly have to deal with college student[s] overriding their neighborhoods. For example, . . . when students have to move out of their apartments[,] couches, trash, and large furniture [are] just left on the curb for the community to deal with.

Paradoxically, student engagement in the community was seen as both critical for and antithetical to the *community-minded* value.

Because this survey was conducted in early 2021, comments on NUU's role and impact in the community sometimes reflected current tensions about issues beyond the university, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Some respondents admired NUU's use of campus facilities to aid pandemic response. Others expressed concern that NUU was putting the community at additional pandemic risk and felt that the community should have been more involved in COVID decision-making. Similarly conflicting viewpoints emerged relating to policing, particularly in the wake of George Floyd's death. Some respondents called for campus to be made safer; others viewed the NUU police as harmful to the community. Such conflicting viewpoints, particularly in times of crisis, suggest the benefit of accepting, rather than seeking to eliminate, paradox as a strategy through which universities can creatively and nimbly respond to stakeholders'—including external stakeholders'—diverse interests (Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Harris & Holley, 2016; Smith & Lewis, 2011).

Discussion

This mixed-methods analysis reveals alignments of and distinctions between stakeholder perceptions of how and how well NUU fulfills the *community-minded* value. Through stakeholder theory (Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Freeman et al., 2020), we can see that although perspectives within groups are not homogeneous, each stakeholder group rated and characterized the *community-minded* value in distinct ways that may reflect how they engage with NUU and its communities. For example, students and alumni both expressed broad but general support for the anchor community while also signaling that they did not universally think of local neighborhoods as the sole or primary aim of the *community-minded* value. Faculty and administration/staff did primarily focus on the local community; however, faculty expressed concerns that this institution's stated commitment to the community was at odds with its goals for campus expansion as well as its undervaluing of community-engaged research and other faculty initiatives, a perspective consistent with prior research (O'Meara, 2011; O'Meara & Saltmarsh, 2016; Zerquera & Doran, 2017) and reinforced by faculty members' lower rating of the *community-minded* value. Support for faculty incentives was only infrequently mentioned in administration/staff responses, which more often emphasized institutionalization and programmatic approaches to fulfilling the *community-minded* value. This range of responses suggests that in a complex organizational system like a university, stakeholders will interact with that system in ways that shape and reflect their values (Langrafe et al., 2020). As evidenced through this analysis, institutional practices can create obstacles to engagement and tensions among stakeholders (Moore, 2014; Stachowiak et al., 2013). Nevertheless, engaging stakeholders in planning processes is critical to institutionalizing community engagement (Friedman et al., 2014; Murrah-Hanson & Sandmann, 2021) and empowering stakeholders to drive change (Addie, 2019). Additionally, strategic planning that engages diverse stakeholder perspectives can help USRUs better understand how their actions impact their anchor communities (Davis & Walker, 2019).

The tensions and contradictions regarding how NUU should define and approach community engagement that emerged within groups became especially apparent across all stakeholders' responses. Paradox theory suggests that institutions should expect and accept these conflicting ideas (Bowers, 2017; Smith & Lewis, 2011; Strier, 2014). The strategic planning survey that served as the foundation for this analysis offered both explicit and implicit insights into existing paradoxes, which can in turn clarify directions for and expose gaps in institutional

actions related to the *community-minded* value.

For example, paradox theory suggests that, given the room for multiple and potentially conflicting definitions of *community*, NUU may want to explore how these definitions can best support university and community goals. As Murrah-Hanson and Sandmann (2021) noted, language around community engagement has sometimes been appropriated by stakeholders in ways that diffuse its context. Recognizing this potential for ambiguity and engaging stakeholders in the work of defining the *community-minded* value may help to strengthen shared understanding of communities related to NUU and to clearly align them with institutional priorities (Murrah-Hanson & Sandmann, 2021).

Furthermore, the survey responses expose how despite calls for better engagement of community members in institutional decision-making, community members were omitted as a stakeholder group from this strategic planning activity (the values survey). Although this omission was, on the one hand, a limitation of the strategic planning tool, the contradiction exposed here may help NUU to consider innovative and comprehensive ways to equitably include external stakeholders moving forward. This paradoxical finding reveals ways in which NUU may be tacitly practicing unidirectional engagement that can reinforce divisions between the university and community (Cantor et al., 2013; Moore, 2014). Without awareness of this omission, NUU cannot work to equitably value the perspectives of external stakeholders.

Finally, NUU's interest in growth and development—which may be intended to serve both institutional and community needs (Harris & Holley, 2016)—is paradoxical to the cultural and social preservation of its anchor neighborhood. These contradictory perspectives—such as those relating to a proposed capital project—can create highly visible conflicts among stakeholders but may allow NUU to identify creative and well communicated solutions that are endorsed by internal and external stakeholders. For example, NUU could look for ways not only to include community voices in planning efforts, but also to strengthen how it communicates its work in the community.

As demonstrated in this study and understood through stakeholder and paradox theories, engaging diverse stakeholder perspectives through a strategic planning process can expose contradictions in how a USRU approaches community engagement and support. However, considering all stakeholder perspectives and identifying tensions between them may offer institutions opportunities to foster innovative approaches to equitably addressing community needs and institutional interests. Engaging stakeholder perspectives in a strategic planning process may help USRUs to enhance stakeholder relationships, manage conflicting interests, and leverage divergent perspectives when shaping institutional priorities (Pinto, 2019).

Limitations

Stakeholder categories in the survey were very broad, so they do not give a complete picture of how respondents relate to the institution. For example, we could not distinguish if a faculty member is full-time or contingent or whether they are tenured or tenure-track. Additionally, we have used respondents' self-identified primary stakeholder affiliation as the basis for our analysis to clarify our data interpretation. For stakeholders who identified multiple affiliations, we do not know the ways in which those affiliations intersect. Still, seeing the complex stakeholder identities that individuals bring to their reflection on NUU's complex mission reinforces the importance of remaining receptive to diverse and conflicting stakeholder viewpoints that may collectively paint a more complete picture of perspectives on how NUU fulfills the *community-minded* value.

Critically, the values survey did not include a stakeholder affiliation option for community members—this is a significant limitation, and, as noted in the findings and discussion, reflects a key concern shared by many of the stakeholders who participated in the survey. As these stakeholders suggest, USRUs must intentionally and by design include community members as legitimate stakeholders in institutional planning processes and decisions to avoid exacerbating existing tensions in stakeholder relationships. The strategic planning committee that developed the survey did not include the Board of Trustees in the survey distribution; however, trustees who are also alumni of the university may have received the survey and responded as part of that stakeholder group. As noted in the findings, some respondents felt that the *community-minded* value could be better

upheld through more representative Board membership, and as NUU's administration reports to the Board, understanding this stakeholder group's perspective on the community could further illuminate alignments and tensions related to this institutional value.

The strategic planning survey was designed to capture stakeholder perspectives on institutional values; however, this study reflects a secondary analysis of a subset of this data. Although our research question is aligned with the intent of the original survey, our analysis is somewhat limited by the available data.

Since data analysis was conducted, we have started to gain insight into how NUU's values survey findings have informed decision-making about strategic priorities. The values are now published on NUU's website and publicly disseminated as part of the ongoing strategic planning process; the values report has been shared with decision-makers. Community engagement has been identified as a strategic priority, with ongoing efforts to strengthen community partnerships in local schools and, further, address community and campus safety concerns through a newly formed task force, stakeholder engagement in community outreach, and other efforts. NUU's progress toward priorities is tracked in a publicly available dashboard. Work on all community engagement initiatives is ongoing and outcomes are being defined.

Implications for Practice and Future Research

First, as demonstrated through this mixed-methods analysis, strategic planning processes can provide important insights into the complex values held by stakeholders, but these processes can also influence who gets to express their values. USRUs and other types of institutions that are place based or community oriented should intentionally build opportunities to engage external stakeholders from relevant communities in the strategic planning process. Furthermore, the qualitative responses suggest that higher education institutions, particularly those that function as anchors, should create more visible, long-term opportunities for local external stakeholders to participate in institutional decision-making. In addition to establishing specific positions or roles for community members, institutions should also look for ways to regularly engage community groups in discussions about the connections and tensions between the institution and the communities in which it is located.

Second, this study suggests the importance of understanding divergent perspectives held within and across stakeholder groups at higher education institutions, particularly as related to *community-minded* values and aspirations. By capturing and analyzing stakeholder affiliations and perspectives through both quantitative and qualitative data, institutions may cultivate a richer understanding of the opportunities and tensions embedded within institutional decisions. Data collection, analysis, and dissemination through publicly available dashboards may help to institutionalize stakeholder and community engagement and may help institutions to leverage exposed paradoxes in order to create innovative solutions.

Third, this study indicates the need for USRUs to clearly define and understand their communities. As the community memberships of place-based institutions become increasingly complex, institutions must think strategically about how these communities can be simultaneously and mutually supported. For example, USRUs might consider how globalization might reflect and potentially support local initiatives.

Future research should explore the ways in which USRUs are intentionally engaging external stakeholders in institutional decision-making and self-evaluation processes, including strategic planning as well as accreditation. Case studies at USRUs that have implemented leadership roles, town halls, and other opportunities for anchor community members to share feedback may deepen our understanding of external stakeholder involvement and influence. Future research should also continue to jointly employ stakeholder and paradox frameworks to understand tensions and opportunities within higher education institutions. Finally, future research could consider stakeholder perspectives on other institutional values, such as *diversity*, *inclusivity*, and *affordability*.

Conclusion

When working to institutionalize community engagement, USRUs aim to balance institutional strategic priorities with their responsibilities to the cities and neighborhoods in which they are rooted. Achieving this balance—which may at times seem

contradictory or conflicting—often requires innovative approaches. Strategic planning tools and processes, such as the one described in this study, may offer pathways to understand and respond to the diverse values of institutional stakeholders and expose tensions and paradoxes between various perspectives. Rather than prioritizing one perspective or choosing one side of a conflict, paradox theory suggests that institutions can instead recognize tensions and leverage them as an opportunity for creative institutional goal–setting and action.

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