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Examining the Critical Practices Supporting Community Engagement Professionals Toward Fulfillment of Higher Education's Civic Mission

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Abstract

This thesis overview summarizes a study (Brandt, 2021) examining the institutional and professional practices that enable community engagement professionals (CEPs) to play vital roles in fulfilling higher education's civic mission. Drawing on field-building research by community-engaged practitioners and scholars, such as Welch and Saltmarsh (2013) and Dostilio (2017), this study employed a mixed-methods research design through an electronic survey of open- and closed-ended questions administered to a national network of CEPs. The analysis points to five key themes that should be addressed by institutions and the field: faculty development and institutionalization efforts, positionality and power dynamics, compensation and support, institutional infrastructure, and demographic implications. Findings from this study showcase the importance of CEPs in effectively and equitably leading their institutions in actualizing their civic missions, as well as their access to resources and advancement opportunities.

Keywords: community engagement professional, infrastructure, civic mission, power dynamics, job satisfaction

Seven years ago, while serving as a community engagement coordinator at a small liberal arts college in a rural southern community, this researcher grabbed a coffee with the executive director of the local food pantry. We discussed how our community faced serious issues of hunger and food insecurity; meanwhile, the pantry struggled to keep its doors open. Six months later, with guidance from this researcher (a student in the Bonner Scholar Program, a cohort-based four-year developmental community engagement program), the pantry organized its largest, most successful day-of-service event in its history. The day's achievements included raising thousands of dollars in donations, completing building renovations, revitalizing support for the pantry, and educating individuals on food insecurity in the local community. The student went on to lead the college's annual poverty and homelessness week of programming, complete a summer internship working on the intersections of food and climate change, and complete a master's of public administration in sustainable development. A few years later, the community, with support from the college, opened its first pay-what-you-can cafe committed to serving locally sourced, nutritious food for everyone regardless of ability to pay. Faculty at the college began to partner with the cafe to offer community-based learning courses. Conversations over coffee that result in positive impacts for student learning and development, the institution, and the community are not an unusual experience for community engagement professionals (CEPs). CEPs are often the conveners and organizers of ideas, people, projects, and resources.

CEP is a vital role, given that institutions of higher education are uniquely positioned to leverage their distinct mix of institutional resources (funding, technology, social capital), faculty expertise and mentorship, community engagement staff's knowledge and connections, and student capacity (time,

energy, passion) to forge deep, reciprocal institutional–community partnerships. Strong campus–community engagement is a vehicle for higher education institutions to advance their civic missions and has demonstrated positive impacts on pressing challenges, such as student retention and completion, diversity and inclusion, and student learning and development (Brown & Burdsal, 2012; Burke, 2019; Cress, 2012; Cress et al., 2010; Finley, 2012; Gilroy, 2012; Kuh, 2008; Marts, 2016; Saltmarsh, 2005; Tos, 2015).

However, due to competing demands and limited resources, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, institutions face difficult decisions regarding prioritization of programs and units. Despite the benefits highlighted in the literature, many institutions situate community engagement on the margins of institutional priorities. Subsequently, the professional staff whose primary job is to support and administer campus–community engagement—CEPs—may not always receive adequate resources or support (Dostilio, 2017; Welch & Saltmarsh, 2013).

This thesis overview reports on a study (Brandt, 2021) intended to provide a better understanding of how higher education can more effectively and equitably support CEPs. The purpose of the study was twofold: (1) to investigate and conduct an analysis of the practices that support community engagement professionals and (2) to contribute to the limited body of scholarship on CEPs. It explored two research questions: Which practices related to CEPs are in effect at higher education institutions? Which practices make the most impact on CEP job satisfaction?

Overview of Literature

Decades of literature point toward the transformative power of community and civic engagement to address the most cited challenges for higher education today, including student learning, retention and completion, and diversity, equity, and inclusion (AAC&U, 2011; Astin, 1993; Bonner Foundation, 2018a; Bonner Foundation, 2019; Finley & McNair, 2013; Fitzgerald, H. E., Bruns, K., Sonka, S. T., Furco, A., & Swanson, L., 2012; Kuh, 2008; Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011; Sturm et al., 2011; Tinto, 1987; Tinto, 2016). Community-engaged scholars and practitioners have highlighted the roles that higher education can play in driving social change (Brown & Burdsal, 2012; Burke, 2019; Cress, 2012; Cress et al., 2010; Finley, 2012; Gilroy, 2012; Marts, 2016; Saltmarsh, 2005; Tos, 2015). The majority of research and resources, however, has centered around three of the stakeholders in campus–community work: students, faculty, and, increasingly, community partners (AAC&U, 2002; Battistoni & Longo, 2011; Creighton, 2008; Eatman, 2012; Estes, 2004; Freeman et al., 2009; Kuh, 2008; Moore et al., 1998; Saltmarsh et al., 2009.

Although drawing attention to students, faculty, and community partners is important, the CEPs whose primary responsibilities are to administer, support, manage, and lead campus–community engagement are largely missing from the field's scholarship (e.g., Welch & Saltmarsh, 2013). In recent years, a growing body of CEP literature has focused on defining, conceptualizing, and professionalizing the CEP role, including the development of competencies, credentialing, and professional development programs (Atiles, 2019; Bonner Foundation, 2018b; Campus Compact, n.d.; Doberneck et al., 2017; Dostilio, 2017; Fang, 2016; Pasquesi et al., 2019; Trebil-Smith, 2019; Tryon & Madden, 2019; Weerts, 2019). However, the current literature lacks a meaningful examination of the institutional practices that can successfully attract, retain, and advance CEPs.

In addition, CEPs are often marginalized in higher education due to insufficient resources, challenges around positionality, academic culture, and power dynamics. For example, many CEPs are not afforded faculty status even though they may hold advanced degrees and teach (Welch & Saltmarsh, 2013). Whether in curricular or cocurricular settings, CEPs are expected to design, facilitate, and assess student learning and development for complex student learning outcomes such as civic agency, social justice, and empathy. CEPs are also expected to have knowledge and experience in training faculty in community-engaged teaching, learning, and research pedagogies and practices (Bonner Foundation, 2018b; Campus Compact, 2022; Dostilio, 2017). Despite their significant roles in changing curriculum and supporting faculty development, in many cases CEPs experience challenges around securing respect, power, and recognition for their knowledge and authority with peers and colleagues. The impact of this marginalization of CEPs in higher

education is pervasive, posing potentially damaging consequences for themselves, colleagues, students, the institution, and the community at large. These consequences include increased job dissatisfaction, lack of motivation to perform job functions, lack of leadership for initiatives, less effective student mentorship, less integration and cross-campus collaboration, high turnover rates, burnout, loss of institutional and community relationships and knowledge, breeding campus–community mistrust, and inefficient use of institutional and community resources (Kezar, 2011; Ruffalo Noel Levitz, 2019).

Research Methods

This study drew on field-building literature by community-engaged scholars Welch and Saltmarsh (2013) and Dostilio (2017). The research partner was the Corella & Bertram F. Bonner Foundation, a national nonprofit organization, and its network of colleges and universities across the United States who are working to advance civic and community engagement in higher education.

Community engagement professionals, defined as employees at higher education institutions whose primary job is to support and administer campus–community engagement (Dostilio, 2017), were recruited as research participants through online outreach to approximately 6,000 self-identified CEPs across three platforms: the National Bonner Network staff email list, the National Higher Education Service-Learning email list, and the Community Service and Service-Learning Professionals in Higher Education Facebook group. The study sample included 51 CEPs who self-defined by responding "Yes" to the survey question "Are you a staff member at a higher education institution whose primary job is to support and administer campus–community engagement?" These CEPs voluntarily responded to and completed an electronic survey. The study aimed to involve individuals from diverse institutions and demographic backgrounds. See Table 1 for participant demographics, Table 2 for institutional demographics, and Table 3 for characteristics of the centers for community engagement.

The thesis study used an electronic Qualtrics survey that included 27 closed and two open-ended questions, based on the researcher's experience as a community engagement professional, as well as Welch and Saltmarsh (2013), Dostilio (2017), and the Bonner Foundation's Bonner Pipeline Project Core Competencies Framework (Bonner Foundation, 2018b). A pilot survey was conducted to solicit feedback prior to administering the final survey. Data collection was conducted over a 2-week period on participants' responses to questions that assessed (1) community engagement practices related to staff, (2) job satisfaction, and (3) quality and institutionalization of campus–community engagement. The researcher used quantitative descriptive data analysis, including data coding and univariate analysis (frequency distribution, central tendency, and dispersion) and manual, inductive coding for the qualitative responses (Creswell, 2005). The study followed key criteria and standards of ethics, quality, and rigor of mixed-methods research, including voluntary participation, IRB approval, informed consent processes, and secure data storage. (See the full thesis for more robust review of the methodology and data.)

Analysis and Key Findings

Five key themes related to institutional practices emerged from the findings and analysis in response to the two primary research questions (RQ1: Which practices related to CEPs are in effect at higher education institutions? RQ2: Which practices make the most impact on CEP job satisfaction?). These themes were (1) fulfillment through faculty development and institutionalization efforts (RQ2), as well as challenges from (2) positionality and power dynamics (RQ2), (3) compensation and support (RQ2), (4) institutional infrastructure (RQ1), and (5) CEP demographics (RQ2). Key themes were determined based on results (see Tables 4–7) that rose to a level of significance operationalized as one standard deviation from the mean and highest frequency responses, and these findings were triangulated with the open-ended responses from participants to further give voice to the themes.

CEP Fulfillment Through Faculty Development and Institutionalization

According to research findings, out of eight categories of typical roles and responsibilities for CEPs, respondents ranked institutionalizing community engagement (60%) and faculty development (47%) as the responsibilities least contributing to their job satisfaction (see Figure 1 and Brandt, 2021).

Table 1. Survey Respondents' Demographics

Demographic Variables	% (frequency)
Gender	
Female	78% (40)
Male	22% (11)
Race/Ethnicity	
White or Euro-American	84% (43)
Black, Afro-Caribbean, or African American	8% (4)
Biracial or multiracial	2% (1)
Middle Eastern or Arab American	2% (1)
Latinx or Hispanic	2% (1)
Native American or Alaska Native	2% (1)
Employment type	
Full-time	96% (49)
Part-time	4% (2)
Current Job Title	
Program coordinator (VISTAs, managers, etc.)	22% (11)
Program director (Asst. Dir., etc.)	45% (23)
Center Director	33% (17)
Total years working in the field (not including undergraduate college experience)	
0–2 years	8% (4)
3–6 years	31% (16)
7–10 years	22% (11)
10–15 years	16% (8)
15–20 years	12% (6)
20+ years	12% (6)
Teaching Experience	
Does not teach courses	31% (16)
Teaches credit-bearing courses	57% (29)
Teaches non-credit-bearing courses	12% (6)

Positionality and Power Dynamics

The second theme amplifies the first theme, delving deeper into how positionality and power dynamics significantly impact CEPs. Institutional politics and/or power dynamics were the factors least contributing to their job satisfaction (Table 4). Respondents' narrative comments also suggest that CEPs in staff roles experience barriers to fulfillment and advancement due to structural academic hierarchies and power dynamics, which privilege faculty. Open-ended responses highlighted this concern, with comments such as "not feeling like my contributions are adequately respected, supported, or financially compensated" indicating an interest in leaving their position and/or the field. When asked to recommend changes, respondents said, "Recognize and value the decades of effort in developing partnerships and programs," "Centralizing and institutionalizing community engagement on campus and having our work more respected by faculty," and

Table 2. Survey Respondents' Institutional Characteristics

Demographic Variables	% (frequency)
Institution type (check all)	
Liberal arts	69% (35)
Private	61% (31)
Public	24% (12)
HBCU or MSI	10% (5)
Ivy League	2% (1)
Total enrollment (undergraduate and graduate)	
Under 1,000	10% (5)
1,000–2,000	29% (15)
2,000–5,000	31% (16)
5,000–15,000	14% (7)
15,000+	16% (8)
City/town population size where institution resides	
Under 10,000	24% (12)
10,000–50,000	22% (11)
50,000–100,000	16% (8)
100,000–500,000	20% (10)
500,000–1 million+	20% (10)
Received the Carnegie Elective Community Engagement Classification (2020, 2015)	
Yes	47% (24)
No	53% (27)

"Allowing students, faculty and nonprofits to see the staff as experts/primary contacts would do wonders for motivation."

Compensation and Support for CEPs

Third, the study found concerns around inadequate compensation (salary and benefits) and support (pathways for advancement, professional development opportunities) for CEPs as a significant result (Tables 4 and 5). Despite their distinctive expertise, many CEPs are not being adequately compensated or supported in their roles. Nearly half of respondents in the survey reported not being adequately compensated, with salary/benefits as a factor detracting from their job satisfaction and potentially leading to CEPs leaving their position or the field altogether (Tables 4 and 5); this theme is illustrated in participant responses explaining why they would leave:

> A position with another organization (whether nonprofit or for-profit) that compensates to my level of education and skill, that offers consistent and reliable opportunities for career advancement and skill development. My future at my institution is uncertain because I cannot anticipate a stable, upward trajectory, and am currently living barely above the poverty line despite 5–6 years of professional experience and a Masters degree.

Institutional Infrastructure and Support for Campus–Community Engagement

The fourth theme reveals a lack of institutional infrastructure (resources, space, staffing) and support (involvement in decision-making processes, senior leadership) for community engagement. Fifty-six percent of respondents identified a lack of

Table 3. Survey Respondents' Center for Civic and Community Engagement Characteristics

Demographic Variables	% (frequency)
Institution's total # of community engagement centers	
One	65% (33)
Two	22% (11)
Three or more	8% (4)
Total # full-time staff	
0–1	18% (9)
2–3	35% (18)
4–6	31% (16)
7+	16% (8)
Total # part-time staff	
0–1	67% (34)
2–3	24% (12)
4–6	2% (1)
7+	8% (4)
Reporting line	
Student Affairs	27% (14)
Academic Affairs	47% (24)
Other	18% (9)
No response	8% (4)
Annual operating budget (including salaries)	
Less than $50,000	12% (6)
$50,001–$100,000	10% (5)
$100,001–$250,000	12% (6)
$250,001–$500,000	16% (8)
$500,001+	16% (8)
Don't know	35% (18)

institutional support for community engagement as the factor that would most influence them to leave their positions and/or the field of community engagement in higher education altogether (Table 5). In response to the recommendations to improve the experience for CEPs on their campus and/or in the field more broadly, the two significant responses were "realistic, clear, and reduced workload expectations" (33%) and "more support and funding for community engagement" (30%; see Table 6). Additionally, CEPs identified inconsistencies in ways that their institution promotes civic/community engagement as a priority (in statements, strategic plans) while not providing resources, staffing, and support consistent with that prioritization. The inclusion of civic/community engagement in institutional strategic plans was the highest mean response for factors influencing quality and institutionalization of community engagement (Table 7), yet a lack of institutional support (infrastructure, staffing, resources) was found throughout the research findings (Tables 5 and 6). One respondent said, "Fully integrating service and volunteerism as part of a strategic plan, not just in words, but in resources and institutional practices and actions" would

Figure 1. Descriptive Statistics for the Variables Influencing Ranking of Job Roles and Job Satisfaction

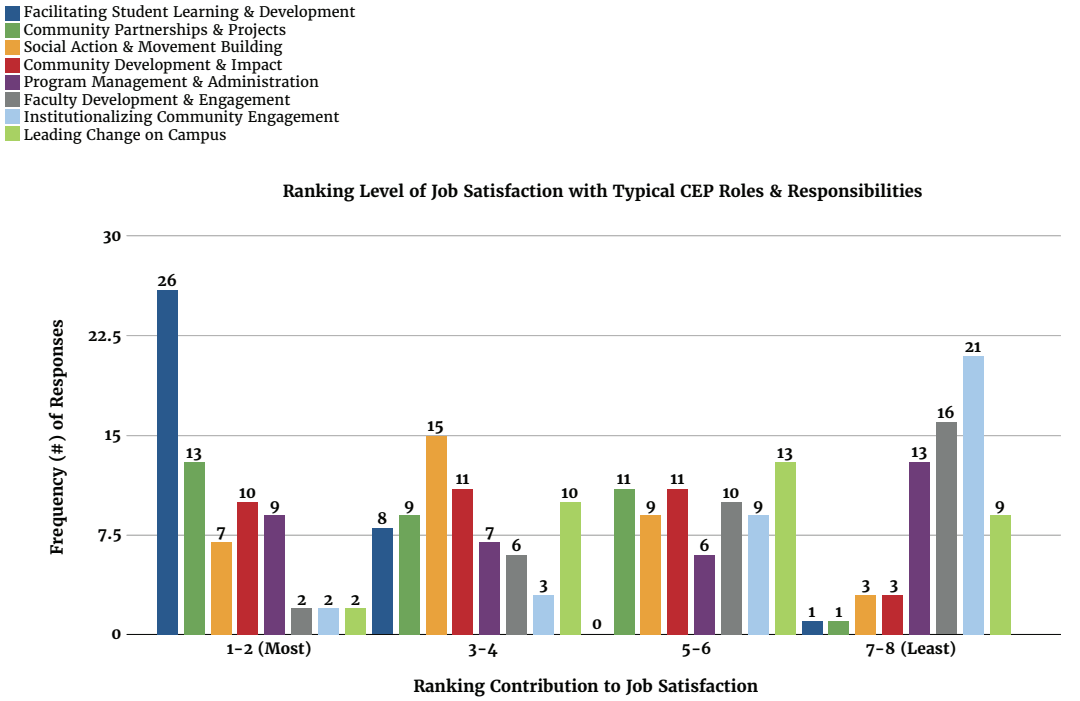

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics for the Variables Influencing Factors Contributing Least to Job Satisfaction

	% (frequency)
Institutional politics and/or power dynamics	59% (22)
I am not adequately compensated with salary/benefits	49% (18)
I don't have the time	46% (17)
Institution lacks or does not provide adequate resources	43% (16)
I have to spend too much of my time on administrative responsibilities	41% (15)
My voice isn't represented at decision-making tables	39% (14)
I am not or my position is not adequately respected	35% (13)
Lack of work–life balance	32% (12)
My institution has unsupportive senior leadership and/or experienced transitions in senior leadership	27% (10)
I'm not interested in those particular areas	24% (9)
I am not given opportunities to advance professionally	22% (8)
Frequent staff transitions and turnover	19% (7)
Impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic	16% (6)
I don't have the particular skill or knowledge	14% (5)

Note. N = 37, Mean = 0.33, SD = 0.14, Significance threshold = 47% (Mean +1 SD)

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics for the Variables Influencing Job Satisfaction—Factors Most Influencing a CEP to Leave Their Position and/or the Field of Community Engagement in Higher Education

	% (frequency)
Lack of institutional support for community engagement (including lack of respect from colleagues and/or leadership)	56% (23)
Lack of compensation (salary) and advancement	46% (19)
Burnout, self-care, mental health	34% (14)
Ideological differences with the institution	10% (4)
More direct engagement with community partners	7% (3)
Make more of an impact in different field/position	2% (1)
Lack of creativity in role	2% (1)
Difficult staff culture	2% (1)
Make scholarly contributions outside of the field	2% (1)

Note. N = 41, Mean = 0.20, SD = 0.22, Significance threshold = 42% (Mean + 1 SD)

Table 6. Descriptive Statistics for the Variables Influencing Job Satisfaction—Recommendations to Improve the Experience for CEPs

	% (frequency)
Realistic, clear, and reduced workload expectations (better work/life balance, more time for reflection, sabbaticals, readings, writing)	33% (13)
More support and funding (infrastructure, communication, etc.) for community engagement on campus (including from senior leadership)	30% (12)
Hire more community engagement staff	23% (9)
Increase compensation (salary, benefits) and support (professional development opportunities, pathways for advancement) for community engagement staff	20% (8)
Integration of community engagement (including with DEI) and relationship building across campus	15% (6)
Institutional consistency in stated and expressed versus actual (resources, staffing, etc.) support for community engagement on campus	13% (5)
More respect for the community engagement field and staff (including from faculty and higher education)	10% (4)
Centralization and institutionalization of community engagement on campus	8% (3)
More direct engagement with community partners	5% (2)
More focus on social justice education	3% (1)

Note. N = 40, Mean = 0.16, SD = 0.10, Significance threshold = 26% (Mean + 1 SD)

Table 7. Descriptive Statistics for the Variables Influencing Quality and Institutionalization of Community Engagement—Rating of Level of Agreement With Perceived Engagement in Practices by the Center for Community Engagement

	Mean	*SE*
Civic/community engagement is included in institutional strategic plan(s)	3.22	0.12
Has adequate office space to meet program needs	3.11	0.15
Offers a service-learning/community engagement minor/certificate/designation	3.07	0.12
Has an academic affairs reporting line	2.84	0.19
Provides faculty development programs	2.80	0.16
Has an established faculty award	2.74	0.18
Evaluates community partner satisfaction	2.73	0.14
Provides faculty fellowship/grants	2.69	0.17
Provides course development grants	2.65	0.17
Has official/operational definitions of service-learning, community-based research, community engagement (posted online, website)	2.62	0.15
Publicizes faculty accomplishments	2.61	0.14
Collaborates on presentations with partners	2.60	0.15
Provides faculty development funds (e.g., to attend conferences)	2.57	0.16
Collaborates on grant proposals with partners	2.54	0.16
Evaluates student satisfaction with service-learning/community engagement/ community-engaged learning	2.50	0.15
Provides awards/incentives to community partners	2.43	0.15
Offers a service-learning/community engagement minor/certificate/designation	2.33	0.19
Institutional leadership promotes civic engagement as a priority	2.30	0.14
Has a full-time administrator with faculty status	2.11	0.19
Provides faculty mentor program	2.11	0.15
Facilitates faculty research on service-learning/community engagement	2.09	0.15
Has an advisory/governing board	2.09	0.15
Has an advisory/governing board with community representation	2.04	0.15
Collaborates on publications with partners	2	0.15
Provides funding for community partners to coteach courses	1.89	0.14

Note. $N = 46$, Strongly disagree (Min) = 1, Strongly agree (Max) = 4

be their recommendation to improve the experience of CEPs on their campus and/or in the field more broadly. The respondent further explained,

> I am an office of one with little clerical support and a very small budget (less than $7000 annually) yet "Civic Responsibility" is one of the five stated values of the College. Institutions must support their community engagement offices with resources that adequately address the interests and needs of students and our community partners.

Two other respondents echoed this sentiment by stating, "Community engagement needs to be at the heart of the institutional mission. I'm tired of it being tangential or performative" and "Continued mismatch between what the institution says they want to do/value and the resources and/or actions of the institution."

Community Engagement Professional Demographics

The fifth theme highlights the finding that CEPs in this research represent a less senior perspective. In this research, 67% of respondents indicated their position title as program coordinator or director, with only 33% as center director (Table 1). In addition, the majority of respondents in this study (61%) had a total of 10 years or less working in the field (not including undergraduate college experience; Table 1).

Discussion and Limitations

This study's key findings are affirmed by the field's scholarship. The literature suggests that staff, especially compared to faculty, experience multiple and more severe forms of power dynamics that are extremely difficult to overcome, and staff typically wield less power and influence within academia (Kezar, 2011). This finding is echoed in Michigan State University's competencies research explaining, "this next generation is committed to equality, social justice, civic duty, and the public purposes of higher education, but is often confronted by institutional structures, policies, and practices that delegitimize their experiences, perspectives, and approaches" (Doberneck et al., 2017, para. 1). Staff members' typically lower position within an institution creates barriers in navigating systems and advocating for change, even though these staff members possess significant and unique knowledge, skills, experience, and relationships.

Additionally, the connection between CEPs' participation in faculty development and institutionalization efforts and lack of job satisfaction is an important finding because the literature suggests that supporting faculty development, building infrastructure, and integrating and aligning community engagement with other institutional initiatives are key components to advancing and institutionalizing community engagement campus-wide (Harkavy, 2005; Saltmarsh & Johnson, 2020). If higher education is to be successful in retaining uniquely talented and skilled CEPs to foster quality programs and carry out its civic mission, institutions must address the barriers facing CEPs, including in their faculty development and institutionalization efforts, lack of resources for campus–community engagement, inadequate compensation, and respecting staff as experts in their field.

A key difference in this research compared to that of both Dostilio (2017) and Welch and Saltmarsh (2013) is that the data captures and represents a less senior perspective. (See Brandt, 2021 for more demographic descriptive statistics.) In Dostilio's research, 42% were center directors, and in Welch and Saltmarsh's research, the survey instrument was sent exclusively to center directors of campuses that received the Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement in 2006, 2008, or 2010. Thus, this study reflects the experiences of some CEPs who are not yet in senior leadership but would seek to advance professionally into a center director role. These individuals are administrators who, often rising through their own experiences as students, advance to positions at the middle of their careers. Then, they may be dissatisfied with compensation, opportunities, the lack of infrastructure and support for this work, institutional power dynamics and politics, and challenges around positionality and lack of respect for the CEP role and the CE community engagement field. If budding CEPs are continually dissatisfied, higher education runs the risk of losing these skilled, experienced, and talented staff to other fields and positions.

Significance and Recommendations

This study sought to explore the practices that community engagement professionals perceive at their institutions, and the

key themes connecting these practices, job satisfaction, and quality and institutionalization of community engagement efforts. The study's findings showed that there are significant areas for improving the CEP experience on campuses. Four recommendations arise from this research, which are well supported by other studies, yet contribute to the field. The recommendations are concrete actions that institutions should implement if they take seriously the expertise CEPs bring and the impact they have on students' learning and development, institutional priorities, and fostering social change.

The first recommendation is to support community engagement professionals in their efforts toward advancing faculty development and institutionalization of community engagement. Recommended practices include (1) reducing the CEP workload by shifting or eliminating low-level activities and responsibilities to open time and capacity for CEPs' work on faculty development and institutionalization of community engagement and (2) reducing power dynamics and positionality challenges, including by providing faculty status, teaching opportunities, and shifting culture.

The second recommendation is to invest in community engagement professionals with adequate compensation and support. Recommended practices include (1) providing adequate compensation, including salary and benefits; (2) ensuring mentoring and advancement opportunities; (3) engaging CEPs in conducting research; (4) providing publishing opportunities for CEPs; and (5) developing campus professional development programs for CEPs.

The third recommendation is to provide more infrastructure and support for community engagement, particularly by adequately resourcing units and hiring more community engagement staff. An institution could partner with external organizations (national or community foundations, other grants, local businesses) to secure funding and resources or shift existing institutional funds to hire more staff. Supporting staff to work with advancement offices to cultivate donors is critical.

The fourth recommendation is to address inequities that foster barriers posed by power dynamics, positionality, and institutional politics. Recommended practices include (1) leveraging and building internal and external support (engaging faculty allies, consultants, using literature and data), (2) establishing awards for CEP staff, and (3) publicly recognizing CEP accomplishments.

Concluding Reflections

The study contributes to the CEP literature by investigating experiences and practices that CEPs identify as motivational and demotivational in their roles. The findings from this study can be applied by colleges and universities nationally as they take stock of their current practices and serve as a tool for CEPs to gain the resources and support needed to keep steering institutional and community change.

The findings and recommendations in this research are also relevant and timely for the staffing and hiring challenges facing higher education. According to a 2023 annual survey by United Educators, "half of college leaders identified recruitment and hiring—employing talented staff and faculty—as one of the most pressing risks facing their institutions" (Seltzer, 2023). Amid the Great Resignation, the findings echo a rallying cry across higher education to address staff burnout, resignation, boundaries, and compensation (Rodriguez & Carpenter, 2022). It is time for higher education to answer this call to both retain and support talented staff and to live out its civic purpose.

About the Author

Elizabeth (Liz) Brandt is the director of community engagement at the Corella & Bertram F. Bonner Foundation. Her research interests focus on community engagement professionals, specifically understanding the pathways for advancement and dismantling barriers for CEPs to thrive in higher education. She received her master's in higher education with concentrations in administration & leadership and educational policy from Drexel University.

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