

Dedication to Community Engagement: A Higher Education Conundrum?

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Abstract

Universities and colleges are increasingly providing internal grants to encourage faculty and staff involvement in community-based research and service-learning projects; however, little attention has been given to the impact of institutional support of these efforts. This qualitative study employed focus group interviews with 17 faculty and staff at one mid-size private research university (high activity) to explore the impact of institutional funding on their professional roles and practice of community engaged work. Findings revealed that community-based projects energized the participants, helped them make their academic work relevant in communities, created formal and informal university-community partnerships, and elevated the University's public image. However, a conundrum was evident in the tension between the University's public expression of the importance of community engagement and participants' concerns that the traditional academic reward structure could jeopardize their long-term commitment to community work. A framework is offered that may assist institutions that are pondering or have already committed to using institutional dollars to support engaged scholarship.

Introduction

The landscape of higher education has changed as a result of campus responses to calls for greater engagement with communities (Boyer, 1990, 1996; Campus Compact, 2000; Bloomgarden & O'Meara, 2007; Percy, Zimpher, & Brukardt, 2006; Peters, Jordan, Adamek, & Alter, 2005). Community engagement has emerged as an unofficial movement in higher education, with terms such as "the engaged campus," "civic engagement," and "the public good" commonly found in institutions' mission statements (Alter, Bird, & Letven, 2006; Hartley, 2006; Holland 1997, 2001). Within higher education institutions there has been a proliferation of centers that provide pedagogical, programmatic, and research support for community partnerships, most of which have been supported by institutional dollars and, in a few cases, by large endowments. Nearly 1,200 American colleges and universities are members of Campus Compact. Additionally, community partnerships involving a range of institutions attract substantial grant funding from federal agencies (e.g., the Center for Disease Control's Prevention Research Centers Program) and other funding sources.

Part and parcel with this changing landscape, the terms "scholarship of engagement" (Boyer, 1996) and "public scholarship" (Peters et al., 2005) are increasingly being used to capture

a type of faculty work that has at its core four dimensions of scholarship (discovery, integration, application, and teaching) which simultaneously meet the mission and goals of campuses, as well as community needs. Rather than being limited to the acquisition of grants or the publication of journal articles or books, this expanded concept of scholarship recognizes the diversity of scholarly activity. More significantly, however, the scholarship of engagement challenges the notion that knowledge is generated by academics and then applied in a one-way direction out of the academy. Instead, the scholarship of engagement emphasizes the mutually beneficial relationships between higher education and community partners, the reciprocal connections between theory and practice, the importance of involving students in community-based research, and making scholarly activities relevant and useful for communities, as well as the academy. In their extensive discussion of this type of faculty work, O'Meara and Rice (2005) stress the importance of "... genuine collaboration [in order] that the learning and teaching be multidirectional and the expertise shared" (p. 28). They also reinforce the need for a nuanced definition of university-community-based work in which scholars go "beyond the expert model that often gets in the way of constructive university-community collaboration...to move beyond outreach... to

go beyond 'service' with its overtones of noblesse oblige" (p. 28).

The ideas of scholars such as Boyer (1996), Peters et al. (2005) and O'Meara and Rice (2005) reflect excitement as well as tension and confusion within the academy. Individual institutions have defined and operationalized engaged scholarship in unique ways depending on their relative size and mission. In her survey of 729 chief academic officers, O'Meara (2005) discovered that the "majority of the [surveyed institutions] have initiated formal policies/procedures to encourage and reward multiple forms of scholarship over the last decade" (p. 488). Two-thirds of the participants reported revised mission statements, faculty evaluation criteria, financial incentives and/or workload redistribution in order to support expanded definitions of scholarship. Nevertheless, the scholarship of engagement remains a contested mode of academic inquiry that is often simplistically linked to service and outreach missions (O'Meara & Rice, 2005).

This new vista on scholarship has the potential to sustain and reward professors who integrate their teaching, research, and service activities and apply their expertise for the purpose of addressing issues of importance to local communities (Bloomgarden & O'Meara, 2007). However, as O'Meara (2005) discovered, the extent to which this new classification of scholarship is clearly defined and recognized in institutional reward systems is likely to influence professors' motivation to participate in community engagement activities. For example, adopting this new vista on scholarship takes the faculty member outside the confines of her office, laboratory, or existing data set. Instead it places her into direct interaction with community members and organizations as she collaborates to develop projects that benefit communities and to produce knowledge that has immediate value to community partners and the academic literature. Traditional standards for promotion and tenure afford minimal credibility to engagement and do not account for the extensive time and effort to produce community-based research in comparison to other research methods (Strand, Marullo, Cutforth, Stoecker, & Donohue, 2003). These traditional standards raise concerns about how engaged faculty will be assessed when the total number of publications is often the basis from which scholarly productivity is measured. This raises a question about equity in the assessment of faculty who expend the extra time and effort to produce research and scholarly products while simultaneously attending to the needs of local

communities in comparison to their colleagues whose research activity is centered in laboratory settings or those who apply existing data sets to develop scholarly products. In fact, Richards (1996) notes that faculty, especially untenured faculty, often must choose between creating products that foster career growth and creating a connection between the academy and the community.

A number of scholars have suggested ways for the scholarship of engagement to be considered in promotion and tenure guidelines (Bringle, Hatcher, & Clayton, 2006; Shomberg, 2006; Ward, 2005), and a few institutions have tenure guidelines that incorporate engaged scholarship (e.g., Portland State University) or include outreach scholarship in their annual review processes (e.g., Michigan State University and Pennsylvania State University). The report, "Scholarship in Public: Knowledge Creation and Tenure Policy in the Engaged University" (Imagining America, 2008) includes examples of public scholarship in the arts and humanities and offers strategies that colleges and universities can use to create attractive environments for such work to be conducted and reviewed. Colbeck, O'Meara, and Austin (2008) focus attention on the challenges and rewards facing future professors who integrate teaching, research, and service into their scholarly work. However, there is little empirical evidence to suggest how this broader definition of scholarship is influencing merit reviews and tenure considerations, and even less evidence describing the impact of institutional support on these efforts through grants.

These dilemmas and dearth of evidence inform this study's quest to understand what happens when an institution commits financial resources to community engaged work and how faculty and staff members respond to that support. In this regard, our study is a specific response to Moore and Ward's (2010) call for empirical studies into the factors supporting and hindering faculty in their pursuit of engaged scholarship. Our study presents the voices of those who have been awarded institutional funding to connect their research and scholarly products to the community's needs. Guiding questions include: What effect does funding have on recipients' understanding of their professional roles aimed toward community engagement? What challenges are associated with their community engaged projects? How does the receipt of these grants influence their scholarly work and experiences of producing that work? What are their perceptions of the benefits that accrue to their community partners? To what extent do they view their work as valued in light of the

current culture of institutional rewards? What are the implications of these nascent understandings for institutions that are pondering or have already committed to using institutional dollars to support engaged scholarship? Consideration of these questions in one university may help shed light on the processes by which community engagement is institutionalized in others.

Study Context

In 2001, the University's Board of Trustees approved a new vision statement which highlighted the mutual benefits derived from the integration of University resources and expertise with community defined needs. Two years later an internal funding source (hereafter referred to as The Fund) was established to support faculty and staff in conducting innovative community-based research and service-learning projects. Since its inception, The Fund has provided over \$600,000, in annual allocations of \$100,000, to faculty and staff engaged in community-based projects and research. These funds are awarded in the form of small grants via a competitive process facilitated by a review committee comprised of faculty, staff, and community members. As a result of this institutional commitment, University faculty and staff have developed more than 50 projects in collaboration with community partners. The experiences and perspectives of a sample of these grant recipients inform the content of this study.

Method

Given the limited research on this topic, we employed focus group interviews (Patton, 2002) as a methodology that allowed for open exploration of grant recipients' experiences in developing and implementing their projects and disseminating the results. This comparison of unique experiences through which participants might expand each other's and their own perspectives was key for the development of data through which the meaning of conducting engaged scholarship within a traditional academic environment could be assessed.

Sample and Procedures

At the time of the study, 22 staff and faculty had received grants and all 22 were contacted via e-mail and invited to participate in the study. Seventeen agreed to attend one of the focus groups. The five recipients who did not participate included 3 who were no longer on campus (1 staff member and 2 faculty members) and 2 others (both faculty) who were unable to attend. The resulting sample

consists of 17 participants (9 women; 8 men) who are staff members (25%) and faculty members (75%) from a range of academic units.

Four 90-minute focus groups were conducted with four to five grant recipients in each group. There was no special arrangement that determined which participants attended which focus group; instead participants attended the focus group that best fit their schedules. The same 2 facilitators led each focus group and also created the protocol of questions to which participants responded. Each facilitator was experienced in conducting focus groups. This allowed for a standardized focus group interview procedure across all four groups.

The IRB approved protocol for the focus groups posed questions regarding the motivation for applying for the grants, the community needs their projects addressed, the professional challenges and rewards of accomplishing community engaged projects, the perceived impact of the grants on their teaching and research, and how the funds have influenced the recipients' thinking about engaged work. All focus groups were audio taped, transcribed, and e-mailed to the participants for member checking.

Analysis

Transcripts were loaded onto Atlas-Ti (Muhr, 2004) which is a software program for managing qualitative data. This program is not an automated data analysis system and does not analyze data, nor does it provide any point and click solutions to data analysis. Instead, Atlas-Ti is a data management system that allows analysts to keep careful track of codes and their direct relationship to quotes made by participants. It also serves as an efficient means to review codes and quotes to ensure that resulting themes represent the voices of the participants and not one particular individual or focus group.

Data analysis followed the constant comparative method outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985), which consisted of four specific steps. During the first step, three of the four authors completed an initial analysis during which the transcripts were examined for in-vivo codes (key words directly quoted from the participants) that responded to the queries in the focus group protocol, which are listed above. This first step in the analysis occurred prior to any discussion among the analysts about the data as this could falsify the outcome of the second step in the analysis also known as the process of inter-rater reliability. During this process the in-vivo codes and related quotes deemed appropriate for each of the protocol categories by one analyst were

compared against those viewed as appropriate by the 2 other analysts for either agreement or disagreement among all 3 analysts. The resulting inter-rater reliability of 75%, as calculated using the Miles and Huberman (1994) formula, indicates a high level of consistency in comprehending the data prior to the development of a code book or coding rules. Miles and Huberman note that conducting an initial inter-rater reliability in this manner does not usually yield a rate higher than 70 percent.

The initial step in analysis and the inter-rater reliability step were followed by a third step in the analysis. This third step involved a process by which the in-vivo codes were grouped by similarity into categories or themes in order to ensure that the themes aligned with the local language or exact words of the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For example, qualitative analysts pay specific attention to ensure that the themes they create honor the actual language used by participants. This is integral to confirming that findings are an accurate reflection of the participants and not an artifact of the researchers' perspectives. The final or fourth step in the analysis involved comparison of themes and related quotes within and between focus groups to assure the representativeness of each theme across all the data for the focus groups. This fourth step ensures that the findings mirror the entirety of the participants and are not an artifact of only 1 focus group or several participants.

Limitations

The small sample size and the fact that all of the participants are members of the same University community limit the generalizability of our findings. However, Hill, Thompson, and Williams (1997) point out that in the qualitative tradition 8 to 15 cases are recommended for establishing "whether findings apply to several people or are just representative of one or two people (p. 532). Additionally, in the qualitative tradition, concerns about transferability surmount those of generalization. Thus, readers will want to note the specifics of the research context and make an informed judgment about the degree to which this study's findings transfer to their institutional situation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The focus groups were comprised of tenured faculty, untenured faculty, and staff members, all of whom held different statuses in the University hierarchy. One of the focus group facilitators was, at the time, the director of the University's service-learning center. Therefore, it is feasible that some of the focus group discussion was influenced by

these power disparities. Finally, two of the focus group participants were involved in the data analysis. These members of the analysis team were careful to bracket their personal experiences as recipients of the grants so that the findings would reflect the experiences of all participants and not reflect the biases of these 2 analysts (Patton, 2002). For example, these 2 analysts shared their own views and biases with the entire research team as a means to create a system of checks and balances as the team compiled and discussed the findings.

Findings

Four major themes emerged from the analysis and are discussed below. One of the themes, student learning and development, has been discussed at length in other studies (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont, & Stephens, 2003; McCauley, Nicotera, Fretz, Agnoletti, Goedert, Neff, Rowe, & Takeall, 2011; Willis, Peresie, Waldref, & Stockmann, 2003) and therefore is briefly discussed. Three other themes: 1) development of community partner capacity, 2) expanded professional roles, and 3) community engagement conundrum, have received less attention in the empirical literature and will be discussed at length. The common thread that runs through the four themes is that implementing their grants and seeing their community engaged projects through to fruition was a catalyst for focus group participants to re-envision their roles as instructors, researchers, and members of an engaged campus community.

Theme 1: Student Learning and Development

Study participants described the impact of their community engaged projects on students as transformative in many ways. This theme describes the impact on students from the faculty perspectives and not from a direct assessment of students. However, the impacts that faculty note mirror those described by scholars who conducted assessments on students involved in community engagement (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Colby, Ehrlich et al., 2003; McCauley et al., 2011; Willis et al., 2003). The focus group participants noted that the undergraduate and graduate students involved in these projects grew in ways they had not witnessed among students in their regular classroom teaching. For example, focus group members highlighted the integrative nature of the community engaged projects in terms of providing students with real-world experiences that took them out of the comfort zone of the academic classroom. One participant described the one-on-one interviews

students conducted with community members in the following way: ... “[T]his kind of work is transformative [for students]. ... [T]his project which brought them out into people’s homes [interviewing] on a regular basis really opened their eyes. ... So you can’t underestimate the positive effect on students’ educations.” Another participant affirmed this perspective: “One of the students in class would go on interviews...and she was really trying to conceptualize the coursework with what she experienced. I think there was a triangulation. Pedagogically, she got a lot out of it.”

Similarly, other focus group participants emphasized that students developed broader perspectives about the relationship between the issues they read about in books and articles and the lived experiences of community members who deal with those issues on a day-to-day basis. An ethos of community engagement resulted from these experiences that enabled students to realize their own passion for this type of experiential learning and long-term community involvement. For example, one study participant noted, “I have eager young students who actually have histories of doing service in other ways, so now we want to blend their service with this passion [for their academic discipline].” Another participant pointed out, “...[S]ervice is simultaneous to our learning.” Another noted: “We’re educating students to go out into the world!”

Theme 2: Community Partner Capacity

Development of capacity in community organizations was a prevalent theme that emerged from the analysis. Although the data were not derived from community partner interviews, grant recipients served as valid informants given the intensive nature of their work with the community partners. This theme resulted from participant references to enhancing community organizations’ tools and efficacy and to fostering the organizations’ capability to sustain the original community engaged project and continue the work that had begun. This was an unanticipated benefit for grant recipients, particularly faculty who were rethinking their professional roles and realizing the potential impact of the institutional funding to extend their work beyond the campus and academic journals.

The data that support this theme suggest that community partner capacity was enhanced in tangible ways (e.g., enhanced tools and efficacy) and intangible ways (e.g., the ideas or philosophy engendered by the projects

live on in agency culture). The focus group participants provided numerous examples of how community partners enhanced their capacity for leadership through the acquisition of tools and knowledge. These examples from the projects completed by focus group participants include: 1) enduring skills for the creation of potable water in rural villages outside the United States; 2) ongoing training programs for early learning center directors; 3) academic research and resource directory/information availability for domestic violence support programs; and 4) ongoing activities to facilitate empowerment and inclusion of typically disenfranchised parents in struggling urban public schools. This concrete capacity is exemplified in the following comment made by a focus group participant who collaborated with an agency whose goal is to develop the leadership skills of early childhood educators:

“... [A]t the culmination of our project [our community partners] didn’t want to stop. They wanted to start affecting these critical issues of using our model of strategic, collaborative, and instructional leadership. They wanted to use these tools that they had learned to impact the critical issues that they had identified ... in their program.”

In this same vein, another participant, who collaborated with a public school whose goal is to engage parents from diverse cultures who do not speak English, noted:

“I addressed a need to look at better ways to get monolingual families engaged in schools, and that required that the students do a lot of research and a lot of talking to people about [how] the normal ways like back to school night or PTA weren’t going to work [and] that the [community partner] had to do other things [to engage these families].”

Similarly, another focus group participant described how her project enhanced the agency’s efforts to build the academic capacity of the young people it serves:

“All of the work [the children] did in [the project] supports the other work of the [agency], which is reading and writing skills and their speaking skills and being assertive and having a voice.”

In addition to these tangible changes, community partners' capacities were enhanced by shifts in understanding their work and its impact. For example, one participant pointed out, "The seed is planted and grows; ideas live on." Another noted the excitement of the children who took part in the project and its effects on them: "I look at these two goals of my project as sustainability of the long-term [service] to the community as nice, but really the most impact that I see is from the children; they get engaged, and they get excited about science and really have an awareness about the environment around them."

Theme 3: Expanded Professional Roles

The theme, expanded professional roles, applies mostly to faculty but also, to a certain extent, the staff members. It represents the integration of the traditional expectations of faculty and the ways in which their professional opportunities and goals are expanded by their engagement with the community. This integration surfaces in the genuine excitement of faculty who are involved in these projects, but also raises awareness of the challenges of working in the real life of community organizations. Participants expanded their professional roles by embedding their disciplinary expertise and personal interests, passions, and identities with needs that exist beyond the campus.

The community engaged projects of both new and more experienced participants enabled them to better understand gaps and opportunities in services for marginalized groups, and to better understand their own professional roles. One study participant who was new to the University used his grant to connect his academic work to the GLBT community. Another participant, who was new to higher education, noted that the grant provided an opportunity to undertake a line of community-based research that might otherwise have been left until later in her career. Additionally, this participant pointed out the lessons she learned about community organizing as a byproduct of her community engaged project. On coming to the University, she had not expected to find a link between her scholarship and community organizing. However, as a result of the grant, she is now interested in developing an academic program in community organizing.

A more seasoned participant, for whom the personal and professional aspects of community engagement "are very much intertwined," stated that his community-based research projects have "earned the trust of community folks which has

meant that [the local community] has ended up being an incredible career home for me." However, for another participant with established roots at the University, The Fund sparked a new interest in connecting his academic interests to the community. He stated, "Until this project, I hadn't had the opportunity to do a job with roots in the community and to get directly involved." Similarly, another participant felt that his community engaged work enabled him to grow professionally. Labeling himself an advocate for making "academic research real [by] getting down and dirty to make it credible," the grant provided him with the opportunity for "personal education and long term retooling."

For other participants, whose previous occupations or professional experiences were community- or school-based, the funding provided the opportunity to re-connect with important practical social and educational issues outside the university. This connection to their roots took various forms. For example, one participant stated, "One of the personal rewards is knowing the kids. Before my doctorate I was directly involved in serving kids and families. So to have that connection and be in academia is just amazing. It allows me to stay connected to the subject matter that I teach. You lose that [hands on practice experience] if you are a full time faculty member." Similarly, another participant welcomed the chance to return to a familiar environment, the public schools. She enjoyed "getting to go back to a school and feel a part of it at some level. As a [former] school psychologist, now a professor, I miss feeling part of a school." Other study participants, who had not previously worked in community oriented professions, noted that they gained a better understanding of the challenges that face community partners, an understanding that likely would not have occurred without the grants that allowed them to be engaged in the community and expand the perceptions of their professional roles in higher education. As one said, "It keeps me honest. Even though we have the same stated goals, I can easily lose touch as I hang out with just other academics."

However, the focus group participants' expanded professional roles also involved several challenges that arose from the unpredictable and labor-intensive nature of interfacing with community partners. The data from the focus groups indicate that these included: listening to the community, understanding and meeting community needs, establishing and maintaining relationships, and managing projects even when

it was not clear if the community organization being served would be functioning beyond several months time. For example, one participant's project with Latino/a parents in a public school was undertaken under the cloud of the school's possible closure. Hence, the project was developed and implemented in an unstable environment in which the faculty member leading the project, the public school personnel, and the parents, were unsure if the School District would close that particular school prior to the end of the academic year. Another participant further expands on this idea: "...community organizations...are not stable in the way that we think of research topics...we have seen massive leadership changes in terms of the project... You have to reintroduce yourself, reintroduce the project, people have new ideas; even the directors and the communities change." Additional challenges of the expanded role theme were described by participants who juxtaposed the time commitment required for developing, implementing, and disseminating traditional research projects with the enormous time commitment involved in completing the same process for community engaged projects. The following comment is typical: "... meeting 15 hours a week in the community ... over 250 hours of observations... and that's on top of 100 [hours] of interviews. So, it has taken over my own life as a second-year faculty. It's taken over almost everything I was doing."

In summary, the expanded roles theme provides empirical evidence for the current conceptual literature (Franz, 2009; Judd & Adams, 2008) which indicates that community engaged projects require multiple, ongoing, and open channels of communication and power sharing between University employees and community partners, as well as the authentic interchange of ideas, histories, and understandings. While this requirement takes faculty outside of their traditional roles as academics, participants described the positive relationships that developed through their collaborations with community partners.

Theme 4: Community Engagement Conundrum

The data from the focus groups also support a fourth theme labeled community engagement conundrum. Quotes from the focus groups that portray this theme represent an unpleasant riddle for faculty who become enamored with community engagement. On the one hand focus group participants noted the excitement generated by the University's allocation of internal

funds to develop community engaged projects as well as the passion they developed as a result of implementing the grants. However, on the other hand, in the aftermath of their completed projects and recognition of the added time and energy required to complete them (see Theme 3, expanded professional role), the focus group participants voiced apprehension about how to continue community engaged work in a context of working to attain promotion and/or tenure which requires more rapid production of research and publication than community engaged work allows. Quotes from the focus group participants that represent this experience are presented next.

The following exchange between 3 focus group participants highlights one aspect of the community engagement conundrum with the first two participants speaking positively about their experience but the third introducing a huge caveat:

Focus group participant 1: "...I liked being out there more because it keeps me honest, sort of helps me understand better what the community need is. ... So, I think it's good for us, as social scientists, to be reminded of how people actually live."

Focus group participant 2: "It is very beneficial for the kind of personal education and long-term retooling of your typical scholar."

Focus group participant 3: "...There is actually disincentive, I think, perpetuated for doing community-based research. And so it's not even just that there's not support for us, but there are actually barriers to doing it; ...as junior faculty there's other costs too: it is not valued in the reviews."

Another perspective on the conundrum is suggested by this participant's statement:

"We have been [in the community] consistently and [they] recognize us as representatives of [the University] ... there [are] gains to the University's reputation ... I hope that the University can make the choice that the kind of research that's in the community, where we're actually going to people's houses [and] are actually showing up and looking at agencies' practice... it's still valuable."

The next few quotes suggest a positive side of the conundrum equation. One participant noted, "[The Fund] means that the administration

is putting something behind those words [to make community engagement as noted in the University mission statement]... a reality.” Another participant stated, “An important message that I got from the [internal funds for community engagement] was that there is University support to do this, and that community service can be a sanctioned part of my role.” In fact, another participant described what she realized as a result of obtaining and implementing her grant: “[My] project helped me realize that I could combine what I am passionate about, in terms of working in the community, with students learning in a more intensive way than I get in a large classroom of 30, [with] scholarly work, so that I really could make all those three [research, teaching, and service] come together.”

However the hesitancy suggested in the following quotes tempers the positive side of the conundrum noted above. One participant stated “...say you publish something that might have a community contribution or publication to an agency or an entity [but it] doesn’t count as a peer-reviewed journal; that’s where we get bogged down, somewhere in the curriculum or portfolio they’ve got to count for something. I think it’s a crucial responsibility of the University to make these kinds of contributions, but if we don’t get rewarded for it...and where we are talking about publish or perish, we’re talking about trying to get tenure...that’s a reality of our lives.” Another participant was even more direct about the intricacies of the conundrum when he stated “...the elephant in the room still remains promotion and tenure ...I am not even that optimistic that that can be addressed.”

The following quotes by two participants from the same focus group pointed out a tension beyond the concern about publish or perish just noted:

FG participant A: “I wanted to use [the grant] to meet the community’s identified needs...I have this other personal/professional agenda of needing to publish and to create scholarly work...how do I manage those two, is there a way to manage those two? I am trying to figure that out.”

FG participant B: “There is a tension between doing and writing about doing in this work... It’s not impossible to do, but ...the momentum can take over very quickly and then stepping back... if you’re going to write about it, it’s going to come out of your hide.”

Other participants, spread across the four focus groups, discussed their perspectives on the challenging aspects of the conundrum.

One expressed concern about whether or not the broader academic world views community engaged work and scholarship as research when he stated, “I think the real challenge is to the values to the academic world and the emphasis on research, and what is meant by research.” Another focus group participant raised concerns about how an absence of community engagement will perpetuate isolationism within the academy when she stated:

“At the danger of being isolationist on two levels, the university level...not being part of the community, and at the disciplinary level that we only stay within our own and only give to our own and that kind of deal...I think that’s a critical piece that’s...again, it’s a choice that I think the larger University has to [make]... is this something that we’re going to support and provide the time and the recognition...that concerns me the most.”

Finally, another participant posed the following question which combines both the positive and negative aspects of the conundrum: “...long term, what are the consequences of these involvements [in the community], and is it something that while it creates a great amount of community engagement at the same time, maybe it will [also] contribute to promotion and scholarship?”

In summary, Theme 4, the community engagement conundrum, represents both internal and external conflicts for the study participants. Internally, study participants noted a tension within themselves between balancing the time needed for “doing” community engaged projects and the time for “writing” about the results of these projects. Participants also discussed external conflicts or tensions between themselves and 1) academic culture (e.g., what is viewed as research among national colleagues) and 2) university expectations (e.g., producing publications in a timely manner).

Discussion

The findings reveal the manner in which institutional funds and the subsequent community engaged projects influenced focus group participants’ perceptions of: 1) community partner capacity; 2) effects on student learning; 3) their own professional roles; and 4) the value of their community engaged work in the academy. Taken together, the four themes indicate that participants developed a passion for community

engaged work while simultaneously uncovering a tension between the work and meeting traditional academic standards for what counts as research and scholarly publication. The expanded professional roles theme and the community engagement conundrum theme provide the most effective demonstration of this tension.

The four themes echo current discussions among community engaged scholars from other institutions, most notably via the Community-Campus Partnerships for Health listserv and website (<http://www.ccpb.info/>). The findings also provide an empirical base for the conceptual literature that notes the benefits (Gelmon, Lederer, Seifer, & Wong 2009) and tensions (Blanchard, Hanssmann, Strauss, Belliard, Krichbaum, Waters, & Seifer, 2009) of community engaged projects and scholarship and thus may have relevance for professors and administrators who are committed to creating a culture of engaged scholarship at their institutions. The authors compile these findings from this study to propose a framework that represents a potential progression from financial support for community engagement toward a path of institutional change on the one hand or toward maintenance of the status quo on the other hand (see Figure 1; phases are italicized in this section for readers' convenience). This framework may be helpful to institutions that are pondering or have already committed to using institutional dollars to support engaged scholarship. In fact, audience members at a conference presentation of these findings noted enthusiastically the relevance of this framework for understanding their own institutions' paths toward community engagement (Fretz, Cutforth, Nicotera, & Summers Thompson, 2007). The framework is discussed next.

While it is conceivable that a college or university could begin the phases of this framework at any point, often the first step is grounded in an institution's vision and mission. For some institutions, this may mean revising the vision and mission to support community engaged work; for others it may mean operationalizing an existing mission statement. Initiating the framework at this step is in line with Holland's (1997, 1999, 2001) findings on the role that vision and mission play in engaged institutions. Our study illustrates Holland's (1999) assertion "that adoption of a well-articulated and broad level of commitment to community engagement as an aspect of mission creates organizational and individual needs that institutions must respond to through appropriate changes" (p. 62).

The framework suggests that vision and

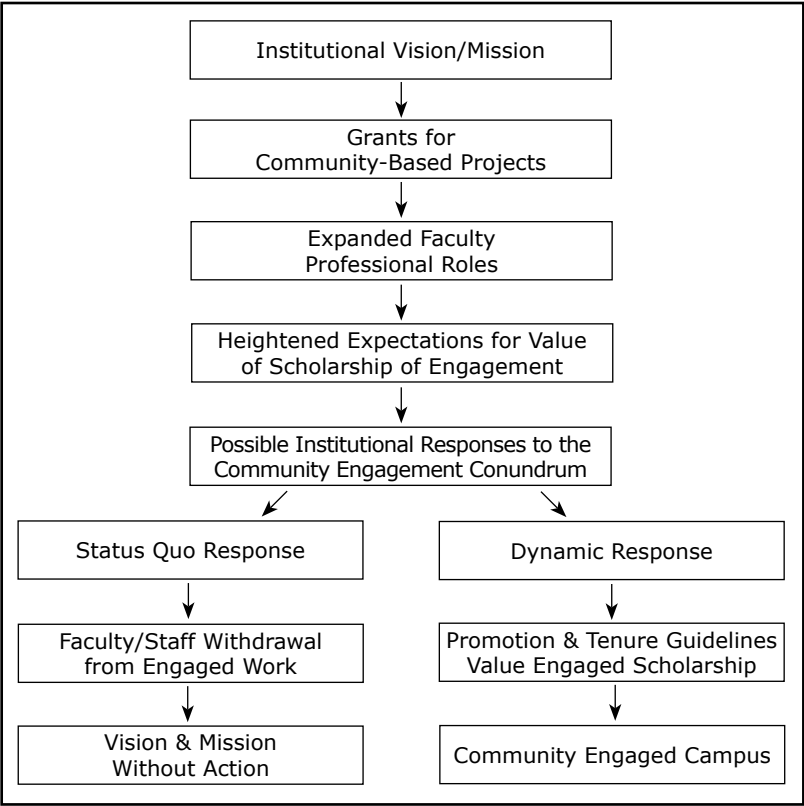
mission matter; however, the findings of this study indicate that vision and mission are the tip of the iceberg. For example, as campuses operationalize a vision of community engagement through incentives such as grants for community-based projects, a significant challenge remains for those that aspire to mainstream community engagement. This challenge includes: 1) fostering a campus-wide conversation on how community engagement aligns with the institution's central identity; 2) enacting the institution's engaged vision so that the community views faculty, staff, and students as approachable collaborators; and 3) valuing engaged scholarship as a criterion for assessing the success and merits of faculty, staff, and students. As the findings of this study demonstrate, once an engaged vision is explicitly stated and supported through internal grants, the complexity of concretizing it only increases!

The findings further suggest that modest investment in grants for community-based projects will set in motion a cycle of faculty transformation. Faculty's expanded professional roles enhance the relevance of their academic work to communities, create formal and informal university/community relationships, and elevate the institution's image. However, the resulting heightened expectations for these expanded roles may result in a push back by traditionalists. As the framework implies, when there is tension between an institution's vision for community engagement and its traditional criteria for ascertaining merit, faculty and staff may feel an internal and/or external pressure to choose between community engagement and successfully navigating the merit and reward systems of their institutions.

It is this pressure, most notably expressed in Theme 3 (expanded professional roles) and Theme 4 (community engagement conundrum), that reveals the struggle that many institutions may face in the aftermath of operationalizing a vision for community engagement through incentives to collaborate with the community. In other words, vision and incentives for community collaborations do not necessarily equate with a college or university being prepared for the resulting benefits and challenges. The final phase of the framework suggests two possible institutional responses that fall on senior academic officers who make decisions regarding the support and development of engaged scholarship. In the framework, these decisions are referred to as status quo and dynamic responses.

The status quo response involves senior academic officers speaking publicly about the

Figure 1. Framework of Community Engagement Conundrum for Higher Education



university’s engaged mission and distributing incentive grants to faculty interested in community projects. While this may result in several high quality projects each year, this kind of work is unlikely to be sustained because faculty discover that the time required for successful community engagement may put them at odds with the traditional criteria by which their work is valued and rewarded both by their campus and their individual discipline. Potential consequences of this response include the allocated funds going unused due to fleeting involvement and possible withdrawal from engaged scholarly work in favor of conducting research that results more quickly in publications highly valued in traditional academic culture. Hence, this status quo response may result in a vision and mission without action. In turn, community expectations of the university will be dashed, and the university will remain as an ivory tower. This coincides with O’Meara’s (2005) point that without institutional rewards, professors will be less motivated to participate in engaged scholarship.

The dynamic response demonstrates full institutional support for engaged scholarship. In this scenario, when colleges and universities begin to develop a vision for an engaged campus,

they proactively collaborate with faculty to create supportive reward structures that encourage a more inclusive and diverse view of scholarship. Such a response regards engaged scholarship projects as a type of research scholarship, and not as a part of the lesser “service” category. This response would acknowledge the contributions of engaged scholarship, both to the intellectual life of the university and to the quality of life in the local community. While publications would remain a factor in merit decisions, additional credit could be amassed for those who conduct engaged scholarship. This additional credit would accrue from the extended effort and time required for conducting research that not only results in publications, but also produces positive change for community members and an enhancement of the reputation of the university within the community. The likely result of this dynamic response is a continuation and deepening of engaged scholarship with concomitant benefits for the university and community. Hence, the institution moves toward its vision of becoming a community engaged campus.

In conclusion, the framework has implications for higher education institutions as they chart their desired futures in ways that are consistent with

their vision and mission (Eckel, Hill, & Green, 1998). When they commit to scholarship for the public good and energize faculty and staff by providing funds as part of that commitment, they can expect the production of useful research and publications as well as mutually beneficial campus-community partnerships. However, much more institutional work needs to be accomplished in order for a university's vision to become a reality. In short, while a vision statement combined with funding provides incentives for faculty and staff members to conduct engaged scholarship, a crucial step is for institutions to reward those endeavors in promotion and tenure reviews in order to sustain public good work in the long term. We invite colleagues from other institutions (public, private, comprehensive, liberal arts, community colleges) to critique the framework and add to the empirical evidence for understanding this process by exploring these and other questions:

- How do faculty and administrators work together to expand and deepen their institutions' commitment to community engagement and engaged scholarship?
- What types of changes occur when campuses connect with their communities?
- How are these change processes initiated and sustained?
- Are these changes superficial and peripheral to teaching, learning, and research, or do they reshape institutional practices and purposes?
- What do these changes mean for individual campuses and the communities that surround them?
- What do they mean for the potential of higher education to take on the issues and problems of our time?

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