Reframing Engagement

SINCE THE 1980s, NATIONAL LEADERS have been calling for colleges and universities to acknowledge and act upon their civic duty by engaging with the surrounding community. Not only should-the arguments went—the university be developing civic-minded students, but institutional leaders should also more intentionally serve the common good by mobilizing the fiscal, human, and knowledge resources of the institution to address social issues (Bok, 1982; Boyer, 1996; Cantor, 2009; Lynton & Elman, 1987). Pursuant to these new goals, university administrators and professional staff engaged with business and civic leaders to establish community and economic development partnerships. Students participated in academic course-based service, labeled service-learning, and other civic engagement activities including voter education initiatives. Faculty members did their scholarly work in community contexts, and sometimes engaged with community members to carry out research projects.

Several formal definitions of engagement are in common use. Most place heavy emphasis on mutuality and reciprocity, such as this one from the Carnegie Foundation: community–university engagement is "the collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity" (Driscoll, 2008, p. 39). For the purposes of this monograph, engagement is defined simply as "interactions between faculty, students, administrators, or other professional staff members on a given campus and [members of] the community-university engagement..."
geographically-delineated communities primarily located external to the university" (Ward & Moore, 2010, p. 39). This more generic definition acknowledges that not all interactions between university and community representatives currently achieve the mutuality and reciprocity emphasized by other definitions.

Community and educational leaders have encouraged the interaction of community and university across the history of American higher education. Beginning in the 1980s, university leaders renewed their commitment to harnessing institutional resources to address social problems facing local communities. In the 21st century, individual college and university actors participate more intentionally in formal and informal partnerships aimed at advancing economic development and thereby social well-being in a particular community or region. As more and more resources, time, and attention are allocated toward economic development projects such as the rebuilding of New Orleans' Lower Ninth Ward, community development scholars have begun to raise questions about the impact of this approach on community residents (Reardon, Green, Bates, & Kiely, 2009). Too much emphasis on community economic development, or what Bridger and Alter (2006) label "development in communities," may have undermined "development of communities" (emphasis in original, p. 170). A singular focus on revitalization through economic development will not, the authors argue, necessarily improve the lives of community residents, and may instead shift the decision-making to investors, community developers, and others outside the community (Mathews, 2009; Reardon et al., 2009). Revitalization may actually disenfranchise particular community residents (Barker & Brown, 2009; Bridger & Alter, 2006). To address that possibility, this monograph advances a vision of engagement not as a desired product, but as the necessary process through which the community and university interact to strengthen communities at the local and regional level.

Engagement as a process, as it is conceptualized in this monograph, matches Fear, Rosaen, Bawden and Foster-Fishman's (2006) definition of critical engagement: "opportunities to share ... knowledge and learn with [all] those who struggle for social justice; and to collaborate ... respectfully and responsibly for the purpose of improving life" (p. xiii). Fear et al.
differentiate critical engagement from instrumental engagement, which focuses narrowly on completing specific tasks and projects. Engagement-as-process, like critical engagement, is a transformative experience for all involved: “The primary value is the effect it has on participants, helping them think intentionally and deeply about themselves, their work, and how they approach their practice” (p. 257). It is in this sense that I link engagement-as-process to Fear et al.’s definition of critical engagement as a transformative learning and community-building endeavor including diverse members of a geographically specific community.

The Emergence of a Field of Study

Engagement-as-process as defined in this monograph emerges from the scholarly discussion of the interaction of communities and universities as it has developed over three decades through six discernible, but not distinct, approaches to issues related to engagement taken by scholars and practitioners: defining engagement, documenting and describing engagement, advancing engagement as scholarship, institutionalizing engagement, considering community experiences with engagement, and engaging for democracy. These approaches reflect overlapping trends in peer-reviewed scholarship, scholarly books and position papers written by professional/disciplinary associations, independent gatherings of scholars and practitioners. The following discussion addresses each of these individually, moving from the early writing focused on defining, documenting, and describing engagement to institutional issues such as rewarding faculty for engaged scholarly work, before turning to consider the effect of engagement on communities, and the reemerging discourse linking engagement and democracy.

Defining Engagement

National reports, such as the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities’ (1999) *Returning to Our Roots: Executive Summaries of the Reports of the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities*, called for a “return” or a “renewal” of what many leaders in the
1980s and 1990s, framed as the historic commitment of American higher education institutions to civic purposes and the public good. Higher education leaders, in turn, asked faculty and administrators to expand traditional concepts of university outreach to emphasize mutuality and reciprocity. Early writing on engagement served two purposes: defining the characteristics of specific varieties of engagement (i.e., service-learning and community partnerships); and making the case to other administrators and faculty based on community needs and the expectations of funders, including state legislatures (Sandmann, 2008). Early service-learning scholarship sought to distinguish teaching practices linking course material to service with community entities to reinforce desired learning from a wide variety of community-based experiential learning activities (Stanton, 1987). Definitions of engagement published during this period, such as Furco’s (1996) typology of community-based learning activities, emphasized mutual benefit to both learner and recipient as a defining characteristic of service-learning, differentiating it from the broader category of experiential learning (Kendall, 1990).

**Documenting/Describing Engagement**

Beginning in the mid-1990s, authors offered detailed descriptions of service-learning and community partnerships to differentiate engagement from public service and outreach. The case studies emphasized benefits for university and community, embodying mutuality and reciprocity (e.g., O’Brien & Accardo, 1996). Even so, very few authors gave attention to public participation in knowledge generation, indicating that the distinction between one-way outreach by university knowledge experts and two-way co-creation of knowledge through engagement remained relatively nascent in this stage (Glass & Fitzgerald, 2010; Sandmann, 2008).

**Advancing Engagement as Faculty Work**

Fairweather (1996) insisted on the need to align promotion and tenure guidelines and other elements of faculty reward systems with the increased emphasis on civic values as the most expedient way to realize institutional goals for engagement. The peer-reviewed literature published after the late 1990s reflects this shift, as more manuscripts reporting findings from community-engaged
storic commitment of American higher education and the public good. Higher education administrators to expand traditional philanthropy, mutualism, and reciprocity. Early purposes: defining the characteristics of service-learning and community partnership administrators and faculty based on a wide variety of community-based funders, including state legislatures. Learning scholarship sought to distinguish service-learning from community education (Kendall, 1990).

ment offered detailed descriptions of service-learning to differentiate engagement from public emphasis for university and reciprocity (e.g., O’Brien & others). Public attention to public participation that the distinction between one-way and two-way cocreation of knowledge was nascent in this stage (Glass &

Work to align promotion and tenure guidelines with the increased emphasis on institutional goals for effective and best practices published after the late 1990s reflects findings from community-engaged research appeared, along with pieces advocating community-based and participatory methodologies (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2003; Sandmann, 2008). By 2000, two paradigms existed in the literature, reflecting two separate bodies of theory and practice related to community engagement: institutional and civic engagement or the work of administrators to establish partnerships resulting in community revitalization on varying scales, and community-engaged scholarship enacted by faculty as scholar-researchers (Sandmann, 2008; see also Glass & Fitzgerald, 2010; Hodges & Dubb, 2012).

Institutionalizing Engagement

As the faculty work discussion expanded, engagement scholars began to grapple with the tensions between the traditional expertise-driven culture of the academy and the new epistemology of the civic engagement movement (Butin, 2003, 2006; O’Meara, 2010; Schön, 1995). A body of literature developed, outlining promising practices and addressing the role of institutional culture in this work (e.g., Hyman et al., 2001/2002; O’Meara & Rice, 2005). Scholars who study the process of engagement also began to draw on organizational theory to examine issues related to organizational behavior (e.g., Kezar, 2011; Van de Ven, 2007; Weerts & Sandmann, 2008, 2010). Work continues to appear in this area as institutional leaders and scholar-practitioners advance engagement as an institutional priority.

Considering Community in Engagement Activities

Engagement, by definition, focused on community problems, so even the earliest works alluded to the role of the community at least as the location of engagement (Boyer, 1996). Nonetheless, a greater emphasis on the impact of engagement on communities, as well as the involvement of community members in the planning of engagement initiatives, emerged slowly. Notable contributions in this area highlight community partner perspectives, offer evaluations of existing community partnerships, as well as standards for such evaluation, and discuss characteristics of effective partnerships (Ayon & Fernández, 2007; Israel et al., 2006; McNall, Reed, Brown, & Allen, 2009; Nye & Schramm, 1999; Sandy & Holland, 2006; Stoecker, Beckman, & Min, 2010; Vidal, Nye, Walker, Manjarrez, & Romanik, 2002). Much of the
scholarship and practice of community-university engagement continues to overlook community outcomes and the specific experiences of community leaders partnering with universities (Reardon et al., 2009; Sandy & Holland, 2006; Stoecker & Tryon, 2009; Stoecker et al., 2010).

**Engaging for Democracy**

The early scholarship on community-university engagement, particularly related to service-learning, reflected a sustained debate on the role of civic engagement, for students as well as for institutions. By the mid-1990s, two primary objectives were discernible in the discussion of desired student learning outcomes: advancing social change/democratic ideals and supporting discipline-specific learning outcomes (Saltmarsh & Zlotkowski, 2011). Around 2008, civic engagement scholars revived this debate, calling for democratic engagement, and renewed emphasis on higher education's historical role of educating for citizenship and civic/political leadership (Barker & Brown, 2009; Saltmarsh & Hardley, 2011).

Each of the six approaches summarized in this section represents one way to focus a conversation that is wide-ranging and difficult to navigate. Placing too much emphasis on any of the individual approaches has tended to distract scholars and practitioners from the potential for community-university engagement to transform universities as well the communities they serve. Such transformative change is necessary because the current structure of the university and the culture of individual institutions present barriers to realizing the potential of institutional actors to partner with community members and foster real change in communities affected by social issues and the ups and downs of the U.S. economy.

**Using Theory to Advance Community–University Engagement**

The engagement literature includes many examples of scholars utilizing theoretical constructs to explore interactions between community and university
University engagement continues to draw particular attention to the specific experiences of community (Reardon et al., 2009; Sandy & Holland, 2010).

Theorizing university engagement, particularly relative to the role of civic engagement for institutions. By the mid-1990s, the discussion of desired student learning outcomes focused on higher education's historical role in shaping research design, “help[ing] us to focus on one set of interesting and important questions about a particular topic” (Jaeger et al., 2013, p. 13).

Employing organizational theory, many authors have examined relationships among individual actors, as well as the interactions of the organizations—university, community-based entities, and the partnership itself—with each other and their environments. Community development scholars, although very rarely represented in the scholarship related to engagement, have also offered models to theorize community engagement (Bortolin, 2011; Stoecker et al., 2010). Full discussion of the rich literature related to each of these theoretical traditions is outside the scope of this work. Instead, I offer a brief overview of studies employing organizational theory and community development models, as examples of questions previously explored using these constructs.

Organizational Theory

Examining engagement as organizational behavior allows scholars to consider questions related to institutional policies and practices. Each of these elements can enable or frustrate administrator and faculty efforts to deepen interactions between universities and communities; organizational theories provide tools for explaining those challenges and suggesting new ways forward. Findings from studies informed by organizational theories provide useful insights as to the way in which individual representatives, and the organization as a whole, change in the process of adopting an engagement ethos (Holland, 2009). Over three decades, we have learned a great deal about what supports engagement.

Achieving the ideal of reciprocal community–university engagement requires a willingness to transcend traditional boundaries and, in some instances, create new ones. Reciprocity is fostered in these relationships by
information sharing that goes both ways, moving away from the traditional university outreach model (Weerts & Sandmann, 2008). Embracing engagement as a process will include community and university representatives making a commitment to two-way knowledge flow. This innovation will not happen until “environmental change makes existing boundaries unworkable, when the organizational fails to achieve desired goals, or when it is thought that goals can be better satisfied in another manner” (Levine, 1980, as cited by Sandmann & Weerts, 2008, p. 183). University leaders must come to understand that the current approach to engagement as outcome has made firm boundaries between universities and communities unworkable, thereby threatening the university’s ability to achieve its desired goals. Universities may have missions that are compatible with engagement and simultaneously exhibit cultural values and norms that present barriers to engagement. Understanding how shifts in structure and culture affect engagement and the ultimate sustainability of the initiatives will also be vital to smoothing the transition from outcome- to process-oriented engagement. Boundary spanners, adept at translating cultural norms and values and coaching administrators into a new way of partnering, will also be critical to the success of these changes (Miller, 2008; Weerts & Sandmann, 2010).

The value of organizational theories employed in research about community-university engagement lies in their usefulness for highlighting the elements of organizations that influence institutional ability to pursue engagement (Weerts & Sandmann, 2008, pp. 81–83). The difference between the organizational cultures of universities and community organizations merits further consideration as well, given that these differences undermine many partnerships (Keshar, 2011). What organizational theories do not offer is necessary insight into the community dynamics that contextualize all engagement initiatives. Community development models fill this gap.

Community and Economic Development Models
Community development scholar-practitioners focus on the development of community infrastructure to support instrumental development activities such as business creation and infrastructure development. Universities
are often implicit actors in these models. Keane and Allison (1999) argue that "[t]he value of higher education" in the global economy "lies in the linkages and quality of [universities'] embeddedness in the local economy" (p. 896). By embeddedness, the authors mean something like the degree to which university actors contribute to what Flora and Flora (1993) call entrepreneurial social infrastructure (ESI). A community's ESI reflects a network of civic and business leaders mobilizing human, fiscal, and physical resources to promote local development and sustain connections with other similarly situated communities. University administrators are important partners in these activities because of their ability to leverage institutional resources to strengthen community infrastructure (Sharp, Flora, & Killacky, 2003).

Higher education scholars and practitioners are not, however, well versed in this literature (Stroecker et al., 2010). Rather than viewing community as a place where engagement takes place, university actors typically position community as a place to advance university objectives (Bortolin, 2011). Community developers instead consider the process of interacting as equally as important as the outcome of the interactions. The community development literature best serves community–university engagement when the models prioritize economic and community well-being over university interests because higher education institutions located in strong communities benefit from that vitality.

The Role of Place in Engagement

By calling attention to when and how theory has been used in the scholarship of engagement, I am intentionally emphasizing the contributions that sophisticated and rich conceptual models have made to scholars' and practitioners' understanding of when, how, and to what end engagement has been or can be employed. This monograph draws explicitly on critical geography. The guiding questions consider how differing conceptualizations of community influence the interactions between community and university actors, and
also how those conceptualizations inform the structure and outcomes of community–university interaction.

Community–university interactions are place-based in that they usually occur in a specific geographic location (Moore, 2013). Labeling an interaction as place-based is another way of saying the history, culture, and socioeconomics of a physical location, as well as the interactions of people in that place, should be noted as very important details when examining interactions between university actors and the communities they serve. Critical geographers explore indicators of social, cultural, and economic power and how people who possess power in a particular community shape the places where they live and work (Cresswell, 2004).

Giving closer consideration to the way university actors think about the places where engagement initiatives occur invites us to examine the power university actors wield and also how they use this power to influence change in a community. When we ask questions about power and how it is used in the context of engagement, we learn what university actors believe about what could or should be done in that place/community, who could or should be involved in the partnerships, and the primary beneficiaries of these activities. Knowing what and how actors think is important in moving toward engagement-as-process. How engagement leaders conceptualize community impacts not only the outcomes of particular initiatives but also the socioeconomic well-being and social relations among people living in that place.

Place, for critical geographers, is a social construct, meaning that a particular physical or virtual location has no inherently uniform meaning or value. The meaning or value assigned to various characteristics of the place or community has been negotiated through the interaction of residents and visitors alike (Kyle & Chick, 2007). This is true of physical places: universities are widely understood to be sites of expert knowledge, while communities have been situated as the recipients of that knowledge, inherently lacking expertise. Human interaction also invests social place with meaning; in this case, place refers to social status or social location within a group of relationships. Those who have not earned a university degree, for example, are often understood to be and therefore treated as less expert than graduates, especially advanced degree holders such as university faculty and administrators. Critical
the structure and outcomes of interactions are place-based in that they usually occur (Moore, 2013). Labeling an interaction as the history, culture, and social well as the interactions of people in that place or community shapes the places where they

The way university actors think about the power they use to influence these places about power and how it is used, can determine how these actors conceptualize community initiatives but also the sociocultural thinking about the larger society's role in the relative value of social influence on the relative value of a college degree versus lived experience. The way we think about or otherwise depict a place can also have "material consequences" (Harvey, 1993, p. 22). If, for example, community members are conceptualized as participants in a research project, rather than members of the research team, funding for the study may be paid exclusively to the university rather than reimbursing the community members for time contributed to the research project.

Discussing the way in which places are conceptualized by those who inhabit them acknowledges that how people think about or conceptualize communities influences the objectives that will be pursued through those relationships and how power is shared among the participants. The process by which university actors identify community leaders/possible engagement partners likely takes into consideration, consciously or not, the educational attainment, socioeconomic class, gender, race/ethnicity, and cultural capital of specific individuals; as a result, individuals in traditionally underrepresented groups are also in many cases underrepresented in engagement initiative leadership roles.

Place, and the way people invest themselves in that place, shapes the terms of engagement: who participates, who sets the agenda, and to what end the

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partnership is pursued. For this reason, I give attention in the following chapters to how community is conceptualized, or framed, when the conversation turns to a particular variety of community-university interactions. The interactions have been framed by scholars and practitioners in three ways: understanding community as neighborhood, as classroom, and as research context, and prioritizing community economic development, student learning, and faculty scholarship, respectively. Each frame offers a different way of understanding the relationships between university and community actors and suggests ways to address issues facing individual partnerships, and the engagement movement as a whole.

A Roadmap

The interactions of university faculty, students, and administrators at institutions classified by the Carnegie Foundation as doctorate-granting universities with the residents and elected officials of the local region, and the effect of those interactions on the various participants can be framed in three ways, as outlined above. The frames reflect the goals of university actors, emphasizing community and economic development, student learning, or faculty research objectives, respectively. This monograph follows the organizational scheme used in a social science research proposal to examine the important role that socially and geographically defined place plays in the interactions between universities and the communities they serve. This chapter has framed a research problem, reviewed the evolution of the related body of scholarship, demonstrated the use of theory in research design, and offered a theoretical frame for this monograph by querying the role of place in community-university engagement. Place as a social construct is operationalized in an a priori fashion in this monograph, in the sense that I begin with and proceed from my conviction that community-university engagement is inherently place-based, reflecting the history, culture, and socioeconomics of the community, and must be studied this way if we are to understand these interactions in a way that advances democratic processes (Moore, 2013).
The next three chapters review the literature related to three different types of interactions between community and university. In the second chapter, community is treated as neighborhood, or place where diverse groups of people live, work, and partner with others to change conditions within the community. The third and fourth chapters examine understandings of community as a setting for intellectual activities by faculty as teachers and their students, and then faculty as researchers. Each of these chapters concludes by highlighting an issue in need of further examination as one moves from thinking of engagement as an outcome in and of itself to understanding engagement as a process for interacting within communities to achieve democratic aims. The fifth chapter reviews the implications of continuing to operationalize community–university engagement as an outcome, and concludes by offering recommended changes in behavior/practice, as well as empirical research topics holding promise for advancing engagement as a process rather than an outcome.